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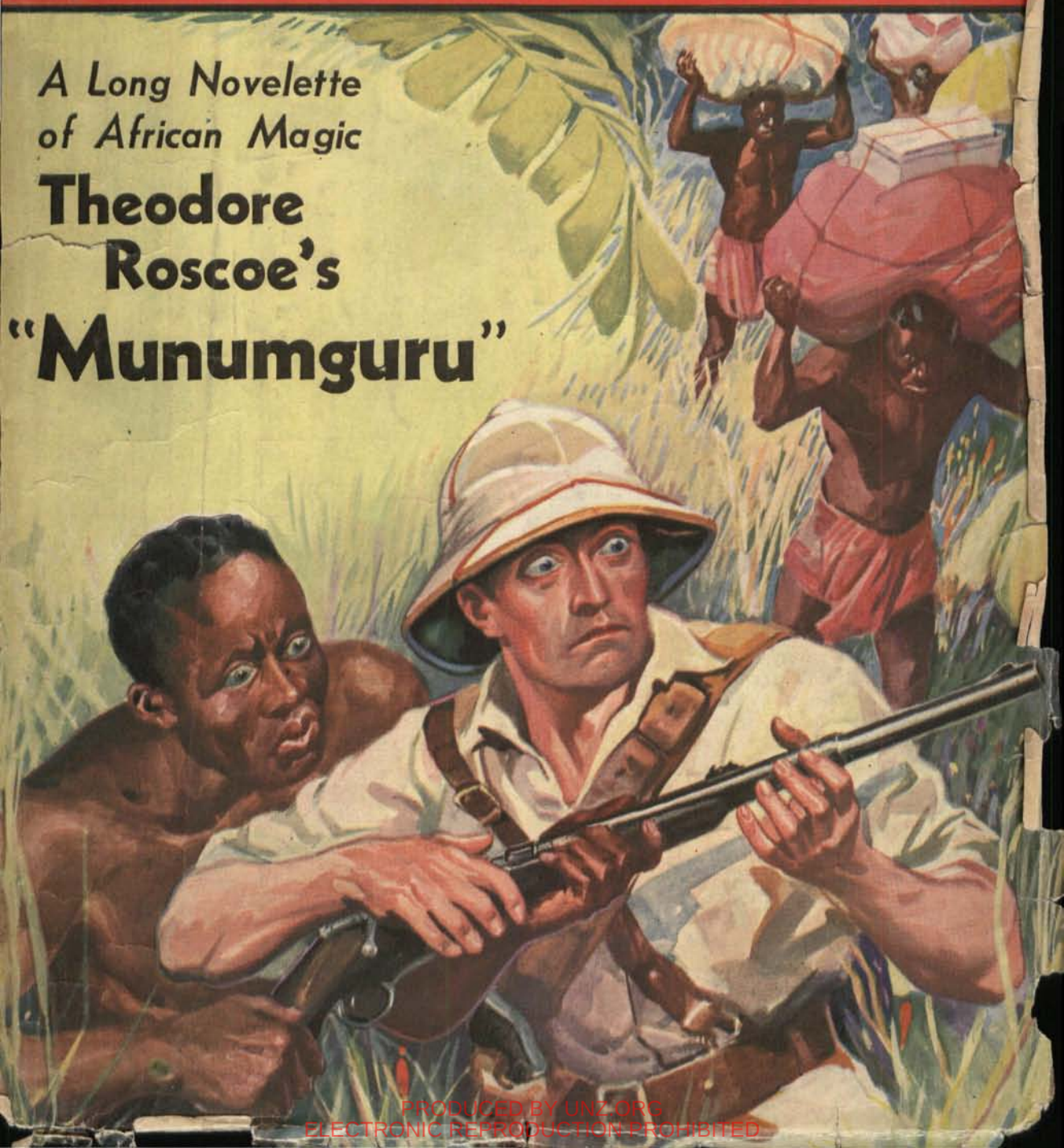
George Challis's new Pirate novel

ARGOSY

SEPT. 7 WEEKLY



A Long Novelette of African Magic

Theodore Roscoe's "Munumguru"

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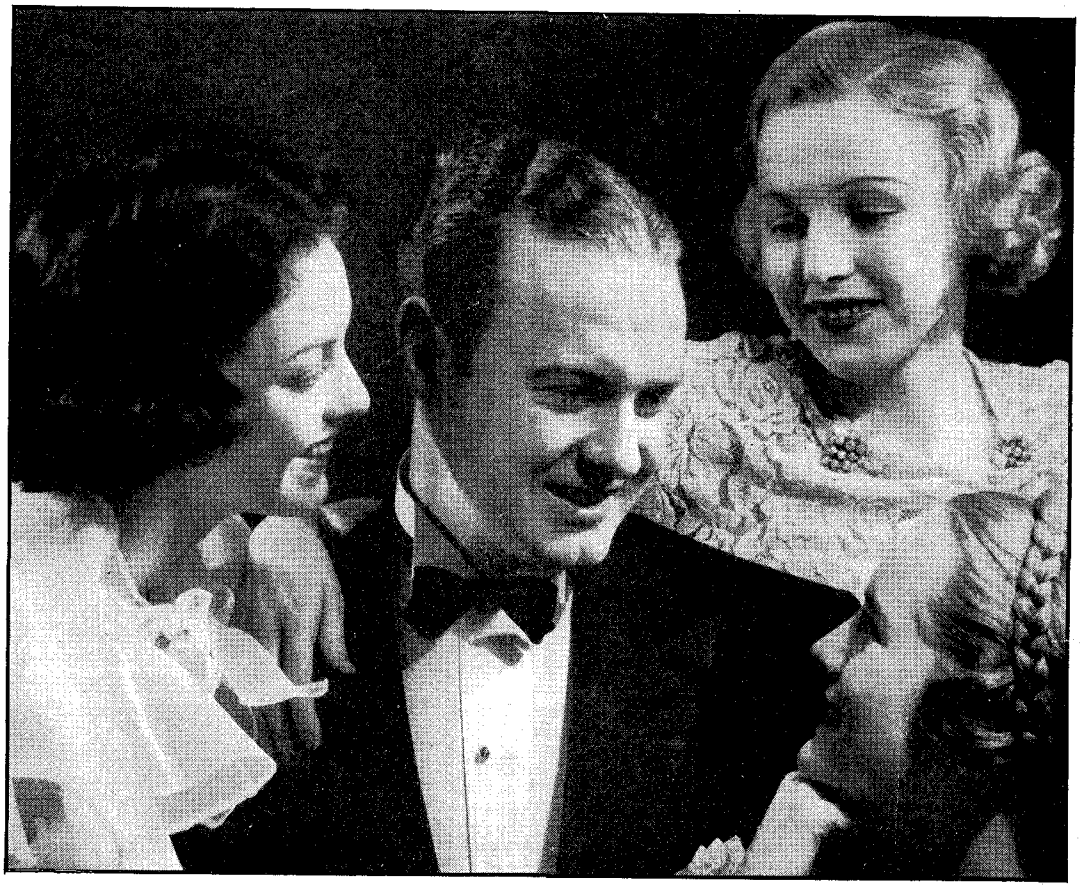

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

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WILLIAM T. DEWART, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary
MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.
111 Rue Réaumur

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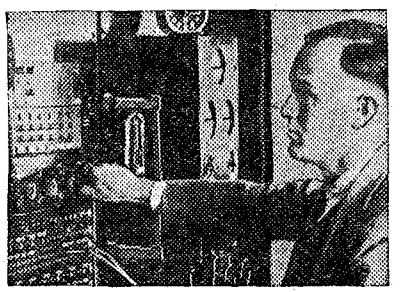

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30x6.00-18		3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19		3.40	1.15
32x6.00-20		3.45	1.25
33x6.00-21		3.65	1.25
29x6.50-17		3.45	1.35
30x6.50-18		3.50	1.35
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32x4	2.95	.85	7.50-20	6.95	3.75	36x6	9.95	3.95
33x4	2.95	.85	8.25-20	8.95	4.95	34x7	10.95	3.95
34x4	3.25	.85	8.25-22	9 95	4.45	38x7	10.95	3.95
32x4½	3.35	1.15	9.00-20	10.95	5.65	36x8	12.45	4.25
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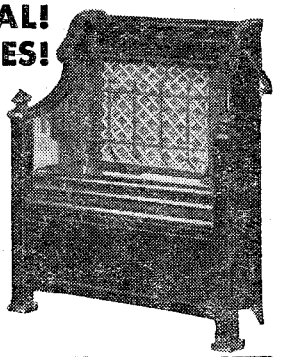

Mr. Steese calls his invention the Diamond Radiant Heater. Although amazingly inexpensive, it is a complete heating unit and works perfectly, even in zero weather. You adjust it instantly to get as much or as little heat as you want. No need in chilly Spring or Fall to keep expensive, mussy coal fires going day and night.

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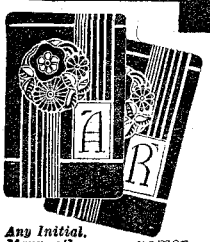

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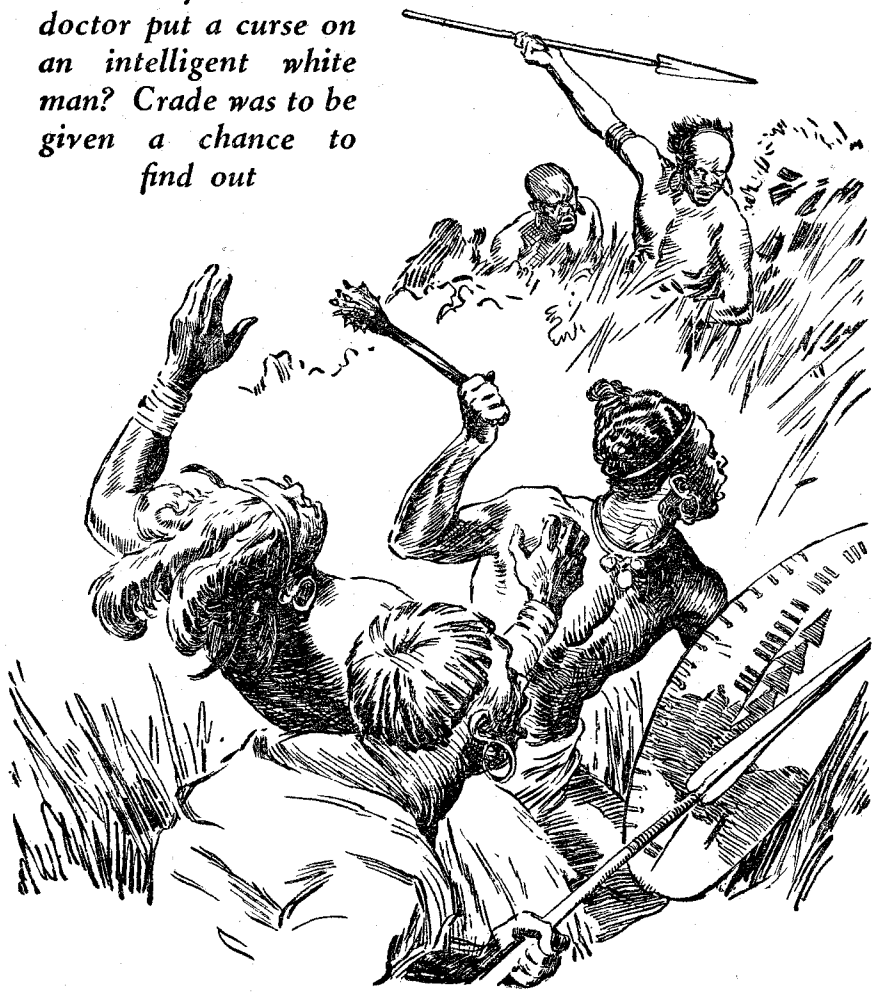
Munumguru

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "Port of Missing Heads," "War Declared!" etc.

Can an African witch doctor put a curse on an intelligent white man? Crade was to be given a chance to find out



PROLOGUE.

WE were late in the smoke-room discussing how odd it was that the structure of certain words, the tonal quality when visualized or heard, conveyed a certain feeling, a sensation, a whole photograph of meaning on the mind.

"Bee"—you see, you hear, the letters *look* like an insect. "Ghoul"—the very sound smells evil. "Ice," "Rune," "Airy," "*Señorita*," "B u m p t i o u s," "Spaghetti,"

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Long Novelette

The village was suddenly ablaze with fighting

"*Salaam*"—words that chill, please, bow, wriggle, throw out the chest or remind of worms. Do not the German letters, square and regimented and solidly black, look like the methodical Germans? Chinese letters in fantastic cackling pagoda towers resemble the Chinese? What could "Australia" mean but a deepwater island far away? "Norway" could never sound hot as "Africa" (that *f* in the skyline is a palm tree) and the undertone in "Jungle" reeks of adventure.

So with "Munumguru"! Hearing it for the first time (but this is *not* a study in etymology) and spoken, even so, in a tipped-up and not unpleasant colonial accent, I was assailed at once with a feel of the sinister; could almost have pictured in detail that West

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African forest, the great trees black with red torch light, the thudding of bone-beaten drums, the scuffle of stamping bare feet, the sound of black apes crashing across the jungle tops, and Ga, the Gueré witch doctor, grass-skirted, cannibal-masked, squatting among his totems and gobbling his curse at the man who dared challenge his magic.

"Munumguru." Crade, the anthropologist, peered at me across the rim of his whisky glass and swallowed the deep syllables. "Speaking of words that sound what they mean, there's a word for you. Munumguru." His chin touched his chest as he slumped his long body down in the veranda chair, and his eyes darkened under a scowl. "Well, what does it sound like to you?"

"It sounds like Africa," I said. "Exactly like that jungle scene you just described."

"It makes me think of that picture, all right," Crade agreed grimly. "Old Ga, the witch doctor, hunkering there in the fireglow surrounded by his ebony Gueré cannibals. Dr. Northgate watching with concern on his face, Annabelle grinning and casual with a cigarette, the rest of us scared enough, and Mrs. Annabelle's low-voiced, 'Oh, Chris, I'm afraid.'

"Christian Annabelle put his hands in his pockets and said, 'Rot, we're dithering in front of this tomfoolery like nervous kids on Hallowe'en. What a fine bunch of scientists we are!' Then he confronted that abominable old cannibal priest with a jeering laugh. 'All right, Pop-eye, I'll stake my medicine against yours any day in the week, and you're not going to spoil my elephant hunt.'

"'Munumguru! Munumguru!' I wish you could have heard the witch doctor hollering then. He began to jump around his campfire like a bull-frog, striking the air with what seemed to be a human shinbone. He wore a horn-nosed mask outlandishly goggle-eyed, smeared with clay and egg-yoke and ashes and crested with colored feathers. He looked like a toucan, some species of four-legged nightmare bird. Munumguru! I can't begin to make the word sound like he made it sound. Sort of a basso croak and a caw."

CRADE turned aside to replenish his glass.

I prodded him. "What happened then?"

"Well, Jim Harned was with us. Perhaps you've heard of him as Sir James Harned, but out here we all called him Sir Jim or just Jim. He spoke up from the sidelines and told Christian Annabelle to look out, that he'd got the old spook in front of us pretty mad.

"'Nonsense!' Annabelle scoffed. 'There's a telegraph wire in the tree above that rondoval and a Fiat motor truck in the road behind us; there's your real magic these days.' Then he did what I thought was a mighty crude thing. Deliberately he drove a boot-toe into the little pile of *grigris,* cowrie shells, feathers and fetishes heaped at the witch doctor's knee, and kicked them flying. 'My compliments to your African gods,' he said. 'Let's have your jolly old curse. Bring on your Munumguru!'

"We were guests of the French government, and the nearest administrator for all we knew as far away as Paris. We were even more beholden to the hospitality of this cannibal tribe into whose camp we'd blundered. French West Africa or Jumpersville, Tennes-

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see, it was a rash thing for young Annabelle to do—a sophomoric, bravado demonstration, like leaping up in church and defying God with a sneer to knock you dead. Only a fool or a man ill humored from months of overwork would have done it."

"What happened then?" I was anxious to know.

Crade dragged a handkerchief across his forehead. "Presto! and that black audience bristled like a menaced porcupine, war clubs, assegais, spears upthrust, while the *kraal* buzzed like an angry hive. Among our party Jim Harned was the only one carrying his elephant rifle, and he jumped to Mrs. Annabelle's side. I heard Dr. Northgate exclaim in dismay, and I was really scared. And that West African witchman was gobbling like a fiend. Munumguru—Munumguru—"

Crade's voice had hoarsened on the grim-toned word; he passed a hand across his lips as if to scour it away. It was quiet in the smoke-room. An overarched canopy of stars stood motionless beyond the porthole, and Africa was a black thread distant under a growing moon. Crade's eyes, following that far-off coastline, were shadowed. Seeing shadows. And with that strange word in my hearing, I began to see them too.

"But what does it mean?" I asked.

"To me," Crade growled, "it means Africa. The Africa of Stanley, black-hearted, murderous, unexplored. It means the mystery of the intangible, something you can't touch or see. Dr. Northgate described it when he said you can put the brain under a microscope—but the mind is something else again. It means a dead man in a tent, a headless wooden doll, a soul gone to hell, a cauldron of lust and hate more terrible than the witchbrews of *Macbeth*. Munumguru! I can hear all that in the sound of that word. It's the story of a curse and its atonement with an ending that will astonish you. But I'd best begin at the beginning—"

He cleared his throat with a silent oath, refreshed memory with a drink (whisky straight) and began.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOFFER.

IT started, this Munumguru affair, in a city down in South Africa where I'd been living a number of years, making anthropological researches in connection with a medical center there. Now the Union of South Africa is no more your traditional elephant-and-jungle Africa than Pennsylvania is the Painted Desert. The climate is temperate and the early Dutch settlers introduced Law and the Bible, and the British brought indoor plumbing and skyscrapers and automobiles. Cape Town, Pretoria and Durban are big, noisy and modern. Our particular suburb was a port for pleasure yachts and snooty colonial homes. There was an up-to-the-minute apartment district, a statue of Cecil Rhodes, a swanky beach club. On the slope behind the town was a new clinical hospital and medical school, and in a more isolated district a splendid sanitarium (if such an institution could be splendid) for mental cases. Christian Annabelle in his blunt way used to call it the "monkey house."

On the night this story opens I was sitting at tall leaded glass windows that overlooked cool gardens, the town below twinkling with lights, auto horns and a faint echo of dance music some-

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where in the evening. People in dinner dress strolled on lawns in the lilac shade of jacaranda trees, and I could glimpse the bay where a suave Canadian Pacific touring steamer was standing in among a sleek convoy of local millionaires' yachts. Might have been Miami, Florida. Seen from Cape Colony, the vast equatorial hinterland, the Congo countries miles to the north, are as far away as the moon. And as seldom thought of.

Man's historical development was my specialty, not healing; but I'd come to know the hospital people pretty intimately, in particular Dr. Northgate who headed the institution. We were sitting in the doctor's library, imbibing small talk and good cheer, just as we're yarning here now; Jim Harned and the Annabelles were there. I don't remember how Munumguru entered the discussion, but I remember the doctor's comment right at the first.

"A dangerous business to fool with."

Harned wanted to know where the word came from.

"Queer about it," Dr. Northgate declared, unpinning his pince-nez and tapping the glass on his nose (a mannerism which indicated preoccupation or interest). "I first heard it from an old Kaffir up in Bechuanaland. Seems to mean something in Bantu and Masai. Then a trader told me he'd run across it in Ashantee, Mongolla and Congo dialects. I've concluded it's known to all the blacks, somehow. And used in any case only by their witch doctors."

"Means something like abracadabra?" Jim Harned suggested.

The doctor explained it was more an incantation; that he hadn't been able to discover any exact, any precise translation, but it was an ugly word. "Has to do with sorcery and magic of the blackest kind. In the casting of a curse or a spell, *hex* as the Dutch might say. The victim of Munumguru is subject to demoniac possession, on the order of maniac-depressive psychosis. Goes insane. I should say it was similar to the hate-*ouanga* of voodoo in its workings."

THAT was where Christian Annabelle came in. "In its workings?"

I remember how his eyebrows went up and he stressed the last word. "Don't tell us, doctor, you believe in native magic."

Among us Annabelle was perhaps the only one qualified to cross theories with Dr. Northgate, and he had an argumentative disposition. Combative might be the better word. I suppose you'd have called him the doctor's prize assistant. "Most promising student we've ever had," Dr. Northgate called him. And he would add: "Too bad he married so young. He's ambitious. And got a brain."

Ambition and brains. Looking back on the incredible sequence of events which pursued us all on the heels of that evening's talk, I can find a clue in those qualities dominant in Christian Annabelle. His solid, cold-chisel, forceful mind that bit into facts like a bulldog and shook problems out of his way. His driving, plugging purposefulness inherited from those plugging, driving ancestors who'd wrested South Africa from wilderness with a handful of oxen and Cape-carts. Scotch and Dutch, on his mother's side a line of Orange Free State *predikants*, stern Old Testament Afrikanders who'd lost their fortune in his infancy during the Boer War; Highlanders on his father's side. Somewhere he was related, I believe, to General De Wet, the

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hard-fighting Boer patriot, and the name Christian was from that branch of the family.

The result was a young man of thirty forging himself through a final year in medicine with a ten-hour-a-day slave-driving industry characterized by a clansman's jaw, taffy-thick hair and eyes as stubborn as steel. A battle to excel and win a name for himself that had started tired lines on his cheek-bones. Scotch and Dutch. Brains and ambition. One could understand why the slim and lovely English girl at his side had married him.

Some women are so curiously beautiful they make you feel discomfort in their presence, and Elizabeth Annabelle was one of them. I never saw her but what I felt uneasy about my tie and nails. Poise, level gray eyes, shapely hands, skin of a gardenia, she was delicate without being fragile and not too feminine to play a topping brand of polo. As Sir James Harned's niece and protégée she could have picked any prospect she desired from our tight little colonial social crop, and a medical student, who had neither money nor social standing in a British colony which measured a man by such limits, was lucky in having her for a wife. I thought I could see Sir Jim's fine, intelligent hand behind the match.

Dr. Northgate did not quite approve, and there's another angle to the things that happened. The master jealous for his pupil. Annabelle and his wife traveled with a rather gay set, and Dr. Northgate warned that casino and race track wouldn't mix with medicine. He scolded Annabelle for burning both ends of the candle, but Annabelle only laughed. You'd never build a paying practice unless you catered to the social crowd. No country doctor stuff for him. He would specialize, and that wanted money and position. You can see Christian Annabelle was practical; hardly the sort to credit anything bordering on witchcraft.

"You can't really believe in this Munumguru business—"

"Sometimes," the doctor said soberly, "it seems the only thing I do believe is that I can't absolutely disbelieve anything."

"That sounds as if you believed in the supernatural."

"At times," the doctor tapped his nose, "I'm inclined to."

THE rest of us weren't beyond staring now. One wouldn't have thought a suggestion of the "supernatural" in this tweedy old scientist's lexicon. Much less anything like magic. Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, author of a dozen standard works, Dr. Northgate wore more medical degrees and honors behind his name than sparks behind Halley's comet. The mind and its workings were his particular accomplishment. Rather, the mind and its failings. He had won more than considerable fame as a psychiatrist, an authority on psychopathy, and was called the "Pinel of South Africa," for a lifetime spent in debunking the bunkers, duckhunting the quacks, outfoxing the Fox Sisters, Cagliostros and nostrum-vendors who infested our native communities. With his professional Vandyke on his squared British jaw, his piercing blue eyes that seemed to look straight through your thoughts, he looked as free from hocus-pocus as a sterilized test tube.

"Don't misunderstand me," he went on. "I'm not going mystic in my laboratory. I'm merely confessing, as such men as Alexis Carrel have confessed, that we scientists don't know

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everything. Some things are beyond organic chemistry."

Jim Harned leaned forward, interested, serious. "There *are* things in Africa hard to explain."

I wish you could have known Sir Jim. He was one of those men who don't take on fatty degeneration in their late fifties. Shoulders erect. Ruddy cheeks, clear eyes, and curly white hair, that was Harned. A tycoon who spent most of his time on a horse and most of his money on charities—a scientist in his own right, having probed some millions of dollars from South Africa's bosom in the form of diamonds. Devotedly he had reared Elizabeth from an orphaned childhood. His money was backing this medical center, and as a sideline he was generously underwriting Chris Annabelle. Gentleman millionaire of the old self-made school, Jim Harned was royal as they come.

"You know," he assured Annabelle, "Dr. Northgate isn't the first man I've heard say you shouldn't laugh at African witchcraft."

"It sounds awfully uncanny," Elizabeth Annabelle said.

"It sounds like nonsense." Chris Annabelle snapped his fingers. "Look here, doctor, you mean to imply the mumbojumbo of some voodoo priest in the Congo could affect the mentality of a man five hundred miles away, drive him crazy? That's on a par with faith cure healing and such rubbish."

DR. NORTHGATE squinted thoughtfully. "Here's a paradox. I don't believe, for example, in faith cure healing, yet I've seen it work. I mean to say, I don't believe in its universal efficacy. For the masses, like sex or John Barleycorn, it can't be rightly handled. But it *has* worked. This Munumguru magic is just the opposite. If one can cure by faith, one can, logically, destroy by the same occult power. Munumguru destroys."

He tapped his glasses on his young friend's knee. "Remember, Chris, these savage Africans are close to nature as cats. Old Nature may be telling them secrets our civilized ears are too plugged up with telephone bells and jazz music to catch. They may know secrets of mental suggestion we're too smart to ever learn. We doctors can examine the brain under a microscope—but the mind is another matter."

"Well, did you ever hear of this Munumguru curse working?" Annabelle demanded doggedly.

"There's the story of an ivory buyer up in Tanganyika," the doctor reminded. "His boys claimed a medicine man up there had spoken a Munumguru against him, and the man reached Mombassa mad as a hatter. I saw a case in a Portuguese asylum in Angola. Young missionary. Complete lunatic, and I don't mean to pun. No trace of physical disability, nothing wrong with the man's brain cells, but a severe psychic trauma of some kind. Fairly raving in a strait-jacket, and what do you think he kept repeating? Munumguru! Muttering it over and over. I asked the Portuguese doctors. They pulled their beards. No explanation, unless—"

"This gives me the creeps," Elizabeth Annabelle complained. "Come on, Chris, if we're going to the club. Colonel Malcolm was going to tell us who's going to win the steeplechase—"

In the door, Chris Annabelle grinned. "I can't believe such bogey," he threw back.

"I'll tell you something you can be-

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lieve," the doctor called sternly. "Keep up the pace you're going—laboratory and dancing parties and week-ends at the races—and you'll go potty without any occult influence. That's why I asked you and Elizabeth over here for highballs. Annabelle, you're to have a holiday. Sir Jim has volunteered to take the lot of us up to French West Africa on his yacht, then a month of elephant hunting. Crade can gather specimens with us. We'll forget medicine and mental therapy and whatnot." The old doctor finished with a headshake, "Just the same I wouldn't like to know some jungle priest had invoked that Munumguru curse on me."

That's how the conversation closed. And I remembered every word of it when, three months later, we stood in that forest-locked Gueré village, miles up the Sassandra River in the Ivory Coast limberlost of French West Africa, aghast at Annabelle's unwarranted gesture while that black demon of a witch doctor screamed the word in our ears. "*Munumguru! Munumguru!*" I won't forget what happened afterward as long as I live.

CHAPTER II.

MURDER.

BUT, for the minute, nothing happened except the color running down out of Elizabeth Annabelle's face and throat, Jim Harned's quickened breathing, Dr. Northgate wrinkling his hawky nose in alarm. I don't know what I did; stood with mouth open, I imagine. I know what I didn't do, and that was make a dash for our guns. A jump like that would have been fatal there and then.

I don't know how far up the Sassandra River we were, but anywhere up that stream in an emergency was too far for me. We'd entered this jungle town at dusk to an ear-splitting accompaniment of rattles, drums and conch horns. The village sat in the heart of a forest as thick as midnight, a huddle of clay-walled, grass-roofed dog houses surrounded by a wall of sharpened stakes, and the great trees looming like cliffs all around. The witch doctor's house was in the exact center of the village and faced a sort of public square. And we were stymied in the exact center of the square.

I heard Sir Jim whisper fiercely, "Chris, you're a fool! Don't move, anybody. Elizabeth, stand where you are. Let the doctor talk." Annabelle's face reddened under the older man's scathing reproof; he seemed abashed at what he'd done, and he backed up to let Dr. Northgate speak. The doctor began a rapid apology, struggling to put sincerity in an unfamiliar dialect.

The white youth had not known what he was doing. All a mistake, no insult intended. Party only wished to pass through on way to the big hunting. Many gifts, many bars of tobacco, cloth, salt would be given the Gueré. Surely Ga, most powerful of priests, would be appeased. Surely his gods could forgive. Many pardons for the white man who did not understand.

There was a pause. One of those faults in the air, breathless time-out in the procession of the minutes while they made up their minds which should happen next. Touch and go it was, for your West African Gueré is about as dangerous a tribe as any in Africa, and uncertain of temper as a box of Chinese crackers under a stove. We weren't in Cape Colony this time. We were in the sort of Africa where Livingstone disappeared. Anything might happen. And what did, as is

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always the case among jungle people, was unexpected!

Slowly the quills of the black mob lowered, then faces split open like halved watermelons. "Yah-yah-yah! Hoo-hoo! Ki-yi-yi!" They laughed. Didn't they laugh! Nobody had kicked old Ga's magic show before, and the sight of those sacred totems booted under the tough old witch doctor's beak must have tickled those ebony children on the funnybone.

Old Ga wasn't doing any laughing, though. You bet he wasn't. I suspect he'd lost plenty of face before his tribe, and his fury blew up into rhinoceros rage. And no animal living can work up the rage of a rhino.

"Munumguru! Munumguru!" he shrieked at Annabelle, his eyes turned to scarlet peas and yellow sclerotics, venomous in the mask-slits. "Munumguru—"

IF the word hadn't sounded sinister in Dr. Northgate's library, it sounded sinister in this witch doctor's jungly dooryard. He began to claw among his insulted stage properties like an old woman who's dropped a basket of turnips; then he'd snatched to view a little wooden doll, a figurine no bigger than a toy soldier, the image of a man.

I don't know what there is about African juju images, something about them can always give me a creep. Primitive people knew the secret of modernistic sculpting long before any modern dope fiend in a French studio ever stretched a neck in clay. Flat-nosed face, dead-carved eyes, folded hands—that ebony chunk was a horrid little doll.

Old Ga shook it at Christian Annabelle. He spat on the flat wooden face. He pawed some sticky ointment from a leather pouch on his monkey-tail belt and smeared it on the doll's head. Then, working dog-fashion, he was digging a hole in the earth before the door of his *kraal*. He pointed from the wooden doll to Annabelle, and yelled like a turkey. Gobble, gobble, gobble! "Munumguru!" I give you my oath, it was blood-curdling.

"Jove!" Jim Harned gasped. "Look!"

We were looking, all right. You've seen a squirrel pat a hickory nut into the ground. Get a picture of old Ga in his demon-mask, his make-up of egg-shells, filth and feathers, interring that little wood totem while his gang of kinky villagers looked on. Planting that beastly doll, smoothing the earth over its grave, pianoing across the mound with monkeyish fingers, and screeching at Annabelle.

Dr. Northgate exclaimed, "He's giving it to you, Chris—why in Heaven's name did you insist on visiting this village?"

Annabelle had recovered a lot of his Dutch self-assurance, and he had the nerve to light a cigarette. "What does the old fool say?"

"He says he has buried your image in the doorway. He's smeared honey on the head so the ants will get after it. When they start boring into the doll's head—you—he says *your* head will be eaten away."

Annabelle gave a short laugh, but the doctor's voice continued in a hallowed whisper. "He says you can't escape no matter how far or where you go. You have offended his gods, and his gods are everywhere. But he's giving you a break. If you or someone of your family comes back here five years from now, exactly at midnight, and digs up the doll, the spell will be lifted. Meantime you will pay

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the penalty. Terrible misfortune will fall upon you. Chris, he's cursing you with Munumguru. He says he's going to drive you mad—"

Well, something in the old psychiatrist's voice translating the witch doctor's hibberjibber sent a dirge of chills down my neck and back. I think we were all relieved to get away from that *kraal.* Looking back from the village rim we could see that old African Druid busy with his voodoo, and the echo of his rune followed us far into the trees. Enough to prickle any man's skin, unless, of course, the man happened to be an ambitious medical student with stubborn jaw, agnostic eyes, an Afrikander with practical ideas.

"Tommyrot," Chris Annabelle chuckled that night. "I'm not surprised at Elizabeth being afraid of witches, but the rest of us—"

Another day's push in the jungle, he was chuckling still. It seemed to me a queerish malaise had infected our party, and no one was anxious to get at the hunting. An undercurrent of uneasiness shadowed the camp. Sir Jim tinkered with his guns and quarreled with the *safari* boys. Mrs. Annabelle retired to her tent, complaining of the heat. Dr. Northgate wanted to unpack a case of books; I caught him reading Reinach on "Cultes, Mythes et Religions" with Fraser's "Golden Bough" at his elbow. Odd literature for an elephant hunt, Chris Annabelle protested.

"Good Heavens, we're miles away from that filthy priest and his juju, and you'd think our *trek* had halted with a nervous breakdown. I say, Sir Jim, I'm dashed sorry I made a stupid row last night, but I can't stand those black ruffians and all their superstitious hoodoo nonsense."

Jim Harned shook his curly white head gravely. "No use stirring up the natives, my lad. And if you'd lived in this country as long as I—"

"Bah! Witchcraft died out with the first telescope."

ANNABELLE chuckled about it, and I heard him teasing his wife.

But I thought I detected a shifty glint in his hard blue eye, perhaps uneasy, too. Times when his face, confronted unexpectedly, looked curiously strained. At campfire he seemed silent and depressed. You know how one will imagine all sorts of things in a circumstance like that. All right, here's something we didn't imagine. The fifth day after that doll had been buried, old Ga and his village miles behind us, Christian Annabelle was chuckling still. It was early in the morning when Dr. Northgate, Sir Jim and I came on him squatting at the river's edge, chuckling and chuckling. He was sitting on the mud bank in his underwear, plastering his cheeks with wet clay, grinning and chuckling and making mud pies.

A chilly spectacle, this grown man going paddy-cake in the mud. I want to tell you, it was! And it was worse when he called us by names not ours and gave no normal answers to our questioning. I saw his eyes, and I was sick. Dr. Northgate led him away and he was giggling like a child.

I shall not soon forget the sweat-rinsed, anguished face of Dr. Northgate when he finally emerged from a three-hour examination in Annabelle's tent, nor the horror on Jim Harned's features, the agony in Elizabeth Annabelle's eyes.

"Doctor!" She clung to him, fearful. "Oh, please—"

He pinched off his glasses in that

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professional way of his and stood there clearing his throat. "Now, now," he cautioned the girl, "don't *you* get worked up. There's absolutely nothing wrong with Chris save he's—he's been overtired. Nerve strain. Worked too hard, I'm afraid. Needs a rest. Has—has anything been worrying him lately?"

Elizabeth Annabelle sobbed. "I—don't know. Yes, I do. He lost a lot of money, I think, just before we left. Stock market. Races—"

"My God!" Jim Harned was glaring at the doctor's face. "You've got to do something for the boy. We must help him quickly."

Terror rose in Elizabeth Annabelle's cry. "Doctor, is it bad? You must tell me! Now!"

Making a half turn, the doctor flicked a glance at Annabelle's tent, then pulled his eyes away. "I don't like it," he confessed in a low tone. "There's nothing wrong with Chris, I tell you. I gave him a sedative and he fell asleep like a—a baby. But he absolutely failed on the—the mental tests I gave him. I took him through the whole category. Doesn't seem to know who or where he is. Lapse of memory, that's all. It's queer. Queer." Dr. Northgate laid a hand gently on the girl's shoulder. "We'll have to start for home, Elizabeth. It's just as if your husband's brain was—gone."

And it was the evening of that day when Elizabeth Annabelle's screams whirled the doctor and me from our solemn business of packing up, and took us racing across the elephant grass to Jim Harned's tent. To my dying day I'll hear the girl's cry shattering the baited jungle hush, icicles of sound piercing the twilight under a great orange moon.

"Jim! Jim Harned! Oh, my God!"

Framed in the door of Sir Jim's tent, Elizabeth Annabelle was frozen in a pose of shock, hands pressed to cheeks, eyes peering inward.

"Jim! Oh! Oh! Jim—"

The figure that stirred from inner gloom and moved out into the gloaming, thrusting the girl rudely aside, wasn't Harned. It was Christian Annabelle who swayed there in the door of Harned's tent, eyeballs dilated, glassy, out of focus, a thin yellowish cream in the corners of his mouth, the hunting knife splashed cherry-color in his hand.

"Munumguru!" I shall never forget the word as Annabelle sounded it then. He was whispering, crying in his throat. "Munumguru—"

CHAPTER III.

MADMAN!

WE buried Jim Harned in the mold-dark of the forest, and started back. Horror is an overworked descriptive, I know. To apply it to our heartbreaking journey through that Ivory Coast limberlost, our leaden-footed rush to reach the Atlantic, miles of jungle wilderness, miles of bilious river, Annabelle in our midst, and what lay behind us sickening our hearts almost as much as what lay ahead—to apply "horror" to that home-going would be like terming the terrors of Eblis as "naughty."

The *safari* winding like a slow black snake, our motor truck barking at its tail, through the forest. The river unwinding like a sick fat python oozing along in sunshine, water steaming around our grass-roofed raft, the black boys groaning at the sweeps. Then *safari* again. More river. More *safari*.

Harned's folded camp chair. His

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riderless pony. His shadowed and vacant place at campfire. Dr. Northgate, Elizabeth Annabelle and I in a wordless companionship of miserable silence where nothing good was left to be said. I know a better word than horror for that trip. A word that was beaten night and day through our thoughts like the ceaseless repetition of a Mongolian torture. Annabelle kept it up. Over and over again. Rigid in his bindings like a captured animal caged in our motor truck.

To this day I can see him crouched there on the jolting floor-boards; Elizabeth keeping hour after hour vigil at his side (I thought of a covered wagon and a pioneer wife sitting late with her dead); the fish-scale shine of his eyes in the gloom. "Munumguru—Munumguru—" like a catechism, and staring. Those lavender-and-old-lace sentimentalists who like to say the eyes are the little windows of the soul, maybe they're right. I didn't like to see those windows in Annabelle's head with that empty house behind them.

His wife's eyes were worse with an expression of concentrated pain, as if she were continually staring into sun-glare, but her fortitude in this heathenish trouble was something to stir a man's spirit. How quiet she was. How composed. I think of her sitting beside her husband in that sun-smitten canvas-covered truck, and I think of white hands folded in her lap. I could hear her talking to the man in that low, patient voice a parent uses on a fractious child, talking slowly, quietly. And that guttural gibberish her only answer.

She didn't break. Even when our *safari* boys dropped us bag and baggage in a swamp bottom and deserted helterskelter through the brush, she didn't break. I'd never appreciated Elizabeth Annabelle's beauty before. I'd always considered it a sort of hot-house beauty nurtured on the velvet background Jim Harned had provided for her. Now I saw she wasn't the kind to wilt at the first frost, and that was the light in her husband's eye—glass chilled over with frost. Oh, she was a thoroughbred, all right.

As for Dr. Northgate, a cleft came to the old psychiatrist's forehead and stayed there like a scar. Something had gone from the doctor's make-up since that morning we'd discovered Chris Annabelle playing in the mud; something had gone, and something other had come in. A certain clenched look around the mouth that had been kindly. A defeated expression about the eyes. I'm not up on adjectives or psycho-analysis, but it was as if Annabelle's madness, failing to respond to the doctor's scientific wizardries, had broken the doctor's faith in his works, tumbled his life's standards down about him and left him nothing but uncertainty and the stoicism to face it with. "Devils *do* enter people." Once, after a particularly violent session with his patient, he turned to me with that.

That sort of thing in a damp-rot forest that shuts out the sky, a wilderness of black-green timber through which monkeys chittered and parrots flashed. Do you wonder I looked over my shoulder and piled the campfires too high at night? I developed a whole new system of nerves during that trek. I played ambulance driver on the truck, and another fifty miles of that trip and there'd have been another hospital case.

I WAS not on hand to hear Dr. Northgate's story to the shocked French administrator in the Sassandra River port where our yacht

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was moored, but a great many documents, Latin words and alcoholic beverages were gone through, no legal grounds were found for arresting either Ga or his Gueré acolytes or anyone else. I believe Jim Harned's death, in the tactful manner of the French, was laid to accidental injuries sustained while elephant hunting (merciful to poor Elizabeth's feelings) and Christian Annabelle was committed to the responsibility of Dr. Northgate, later to be consigned to British authority.

Then our yachting trip from that Ivory Coast mudhole down to the Cape was the brand you don't read about in pleasure cruise catalogues. Abominably, the weather going south, which should have accompanied our sadness with decent sobriety, was lazy as a summerland lake bright-hued on Japanese silk. Abominable because we cruised on Jim Harned's yacht, and Sir Jim wasn't with us. Particularly abominable because Christian Annabelle was. Locked in his stateroom below, he made the voyage unbearable with his meaningless cries and savage poundings.

Dr. Northgate had hoped something vague about "the sea air." Annabelle worsened at every nautical mile.

Elizabeth Annabelle told me with tragedy in her voice, "If Chris only realized he was going home like this—in Jim's yacht—after what happened back there, it—it would kill him—"

So we didn't tell her we weren't sailing home in Sir Jim's yacht, after all. As a close friend of Sir Jim's, Dr. Northgate was well aware of the disposition of Jim Harned's will; everything, he told me, was left to Elizabeth. The yacht, Sir Jim's Kimberley holdings, his farms in Basutoland, his estates on the Orange River and the Limpopo, and the fine old mansion not far from Dr. Northgate's hospital.

"The girl will be worth over thirty million—"

You may imagine, perhaps, that her homecoming with Chris was dismal enough without knowing that.

"Crade," the doctor informed me, "you'll have to tell her. I can't. It's too much. She was everything to Sir Jim. Everything! It's too shocking. Don't leave it up to the stupid lawyers, and for Heaven's sake we mustn't tell her until after Chris is—taken care of."

We were standing on the yacht's darkened foredeck where I'd carried an unsociable glass, and I recall the doctor's gray-knuckled fists twisting on the ship's rail.

"Crade! Crade! As a reasonable human, can you believe that a dirty African medicine man, hundreds of miles away in a stinking grass village, could bury a wooden doll and—"

Well, he hadn't mentioned that Gueré magician before, not since the thing happened; his outburst did not surprise me, I think, as much as it surprised himself. I could understand what was taking place in his mind. It had been all right to say, theoretically, there might be something in witchcraft, but now, the evidence up against him, every fiber of his training wanted to reject the fact.

"Bah!" He broke off angrily, rapping his glasses against his palm. "And *I'm* supposed to be a psychiatrist. Here's a man insane who shouldn't be insane. I can do nothing for Annabelle now. Nothing."

THOSE specialists, bespectacled, septic-handed, bearded with learning, who gathered to meet us in the hospital, could do no more.

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There were white-coated this-opaths and that-opaths. Alienists in grave consultation. Annabelle remained under observation a week, and in the end the verdict was a solemn pronouncement on paper of what we already knew. Elizabeth Annabelle came with pain in her eyes to tell me her husband was to be confined.

"You'll send him to England, of course," I advised.

"No, no. Dr. Northgate would rather have him here. I want him to have full charge of Chris. We're not giving up, you see."

It all seemed incredible, impossible, down there in Cape Colony where people in dinner dress strolled on shady lawns and a sleek Cunard touring steamer stood against the sea.

"Insanity induced by over-fatigue, touch of malarial infection, possible sunstroke . . ." something like that, and a crisp diagnosis in German psychopathological terms only a medical book could understand. The this-opaths and that-opaths understood. But I had to remember the mouth of the Sassandra River, that night at the French administrator's. The French administrator was neither learned nor abstemious, but he knew his country; and I saw him, that night, after hearing the doctor's story, give one of those "but who can tell?" shrugs and move to the edge of his veranda to stare at the black-green silences from which we'd come.

And I had to remember the doctor's words on the yacht. "Crade! Crade! As a reasonable human can you believe—"

And I had to remember the chant of old Ga, the witch doctor, as he snatched a little doll from his insulted properties and buried it in the ground. "*Munumguru*—"

German psychopathological terms? What terms would you use to describe the feeling that caused me to know for a certainty that some day I was going back to that Gueré village and have it out with Ga? I swore I'd never go into French West Africa again, and as surely, as if propelled by some agency beyond my volition, I went. Lord help me, Elizabeth Annabelle went too. But five years were to wear themselves out before we started.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAIL BACK.

FIVE years! Time heals as it flies, and now I'm shocked remembering how those years drifted along, how calloused I became to the Annabelle tragedy, how occupied with the trivial squirrel cage of my own destiny. Business took me to Natal, New Zealand, Australia, America. I spent a year in the States. In that healthier climate I came to the point where I remembered old Ga and his capers with distrust of my vision, where I accused myself of too much imagination about the Annabelle affair. I was living in a world of telephones, wireless, electric light bulbs. One needed stars and the frog-cough of a jungle swamp and forest nights for magic.

In perspective I could believe that the whole thing was unextraordinary. Annabelle wasn't the first medical student who'd worked his brain too hard. Nor the first to go mad in the equatorial jungle. Our own nerves had been raw as razors and the chance meeting of a black witchman had cooked everything to a boiling point. The alienists in Cape Colony were right. Chris Annabelle had caved in from overwork, malaria, sunstroke.

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Rarely did I wake bolt upright in the dead of night with an echoy "Munumguru!" startling me from pleasanter dreams. Little by little I could eradicate that caterwauling priest from my thoughts. It doesn't do to think too much about such things, so I didn't think about them.

In the States I heard from Dr. Northgate, a crisp note telling little enough and more than enough.

"No change," he wrote, and the usual bromide, "but Chris is doing as well as could be expected. At first he paced his cell muttering that unholy mumbo-jumbo, but now he just sits and stares. In the occupational ward he is quiet enough, although he makes no attempt to join the other patients in their exercises. Elizabeth sees him every day and sometimes walks him through the grounds.

"Elizabeth has behaved magnificently, and in all my experience I have never seen such self-possession—when one thinks of her brilliant husband going to pieces like this. I could weep when I see them together. He does not seem to recognize her, and I am convinced his reason will never be restored. Her friends have stood behind her, and the case has been handled with the utmost discretion. Story is that Sir Jim was killed in an accident and Christian Annabelle, ravaged by fever and overcome by his friend's death, is suffering a severe nervous breakdown."

The letter went on to say that Elizabeth, inheriting Jim Harned's millions, had donated half the fortune toward building hospitals around the Cape. She had put aside a trust fund for her husband, and was spending money like water on his treatment and medical care. She was living in Sir Jim's mansion and keeping the yacht, as she believed that was what Sir Jim would have wanted.

The doctor closed by saying he was glad the girl was taking the sensible view, and myself, I was relieved. After all, the tragedy was not mine, and I put it behind me. I went to Sydney, Australia, to close a lecture tour. Munumguru? I'd all but forgotten the word. And there was a cablegram waiting me in the hotel.

> Come at once. Important, be ready to travel. About Chris. You are the only one who can help me. Please.
>
> ELIZABETH ANNABELLE.

"My God!" I thought, "he's escaped!"

BUT Chris Annabelle hadn't escaped, and somehow I wasn't surprised to find myself in the drawing room of Elizabeth's colonial mansion late one evening, her servants busy with luggage and closing the house, the girl in traveling costume, clinging to my hands and deathly pale.

"Mr. Crade! Mr. Crade! If you knew how glad I am to see you. Oh, I knew you wouldn't fail me now—"

"What's happened? Where are you going?"

"I've not told Dr. Northgate," she whispered. "He'd try to stop me. He mustn't know until we've gone—"

Her face frightened me. "What are you going to do?"

Her eyes that night were almost black, and her fingers were relentless and icy on my hand. "Do you remember the words of that witch doctor, Mr. Crade? When he buried the doll with honey on its head so the —the ants would eat the wood? Tell me! Do you remember?"

A porter bustled by with a kit of high-powered rifles I recalled as be-

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longing to Sir Jim. Servants were pounding at a packing case, and I could see a pair of sailors, cap in hand, in the outer hall.

"Elizabeth, in Heaven's name—"

You know how ghostly a drawing room can look with the furniture all shrouded in white coverings? Not half as ghostly as Elizabeth Annabelle's words coming as if from a past five years behind us. Her voice quickened, low. "I'll tell you what the witch doctor said. 'Come back in five years,' he said. 'Dig up the doll exactly at midnight five years from this day, and the spell will go away—'"

I caught her by the shoulders and shook her. "You're not going up to that beastly jungle. There's no such thing as this witchcraft! You can't do it, Elizabeth," I was shouting. "The doll wouldn't be there—"

"In six more weeks Chris will have been—it will have been exactly five years' time," she said in a voice of stone. "Haven't the doctors failed to help him? Dr. Northgate can do nothing. Now I'm going to try. It's our last hope, don't you see? My last chance to save my husband from that—that awful place on the hill! I want your help terribly. I'm going back to that jungle and dig up that wooden doll—"

"But you can't!" I cried. "It's too dangerous—"

Precisely the words of the astounded French administrator (can you see his bug-eyed amazement at sight of the white yacht cruising into the muddy headwaters of the Sassandra; Mrs. Annabelle and I standing once again in the filth and green stench of that jungle port?)—the first words from his lips when we invaded his bungalow for permission papers and *safari.*

"*Mon Dieu!*" he remembered us with astonished unbelief. "Madam wishes again to journey into the country of the Gueré? But madam cannot have permission. It is too dangerous."

"You will furnish us with men and guides. And quickly, quickly!"

"But I fear I cannot permit, madam. We have of late suffered severe trouble with the Gueré tribes. The roads, they have been torn up. The natives are of a temper the most ugly. For a white woman I cannot permit—"

He couldn't permit? That Frenchman didn't know Elizabeth Annabelle. She gave him the same sort of look she gave me on that night we sailed from Cape Colony, a look that would have melted the intentions of a granite image. His arguments melted like snowdrops before the fire of her resolve. It wasn't long before he was mopping his forehead and bowing at the hips.

"*Alors,* a possibility it can be arranged. If madam will wait a fortnight, a company of Tirailleurs will be back from patrol, and I can then arrange for an escort of soldiers—"

"No, no! We must be *there* in a fortnight. No time to lose. I must start at once!"

DO you think that jungle-bitten Frenchman with his delicate skin and toothbrush mustache could stop Elizabeth Annabelle? Four o'clock the next morning, darkness decaying into yellow in the east, we started. *Safari,* guns, horses, palanquins, and the administrator's own house boy—a black named Hyacinth who didn't want to go and carried a pocketful of juju charms to ward off the peril he knew was up ahead.

Off into black-green silence the river crawled like a poisoned vein; the

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trail followed its bank of chrome mud; Mrs. Annabelle rode, chin high, eyes straight forward and shining in the armor of her faith, a youthful Tancred off on her own Crusade. And the white-faced, baffled and utterly dispirited French administrator came down to see us off and crossed himself as we plunged with our frightened bearers into the forest wall.

I give you my word I didn't want to go back into that country with Elizabeth Annabelle. There were ghosts in that Ivory Coast hinterland I didn't want to meet again. Five years had made no more change in that steaming, dark-hearted, timeless wilderness than they'd made in the mind of Chris Annabelle locked in his asylum cell a sea-voyage away.

It seemed yesterday we'd followed this path with Jim Harned on an elephant hunt. I thought of Sir Jim buried somewhere at its darkest end. I thought of old Ga screaming among his totems, cursing Chris Annabelle's skepticism, squirrel-burying his fiendish toy. I thought of the evening we found Annabelle swaying in the doorway of Harned's tent with a hunting knife guttering in his hand.

No, I didn't want to travel back into that sort of thing with a beautiful white woman. But here's the odd part I'm trying to explain. 'Way in the back of my thick skull, I'd known I was going to take that jaunt. For five years I'd hidden this Munumguru business among the cranial cobwebs of my head, like a box of mementos you lay away in the attic and don't want to open. I'd hidden this Munumguru affair in the attic of my mind where it could gather dust and be forgotten. But down underneath I'd known the time was coming when that evil reliquary must be reopened and its contents examined for one last look. Now the fever broke out in me like something latent from my blood. I couldn't have stopped Elizabeth Annabelle anyway; all the king's horses couldn't have held her back. And I wanted to find out about old Ga's magic for myself. I wanted to learn the truth. I had to know about that doll!

Deep in the morning darkness of the forest a two-toned African drum was throbbing. The cadence pulsed through my hearing and started an undertone chant. *Munum-guru—Munum-guru—*

"Hurry!" Elizabeth Annabelle was pleading. "We must hurry!"

NOW I'm going to tell you something. It had been hell riding out of this forest with Chris Annabelle mad as a hatter, the doctor baffled and sick, the agonized young wife, and Sir Jim's undried mound behind us. It had been hell that time. But we'd had a motor truck with us, then, and we'd been moving toward home.

Going back into that African limberlost with Elizabeth Annabelle, the responsibility alone on my shoulders, no motor truck because the roads were gone, was double hell. The stupefying heat. The jungle crushing around us to drink up the last of the air. Trees so crowded the green daylight could scarcely squeeze through. Narrow trails tunneling under galleries of liana and vine. Swamps alive with crocodiles. Mosquitoes thick as smoke. A few grass villages where purple-black men leaned on sullen spears to watch us go by. I don't suppose the Ivory Coast jungle is any tougher than certain parts of the Amazonas or the India *terai,* but that trek got under my skin in a way that was peculiar to the territory.

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Do you wonder that forest began to wreck my nerves after what I knew had happened in there? Witchcraft aside, that trail would have made my flesh walk; and I couldn't put witchcraft aside.

We left the Sassandra to squirm off by itself after the first day, and from then on civilization dropped behind us at the rate of a thousand years a mile. Once there'd been a road (hadn't I driven along it, playing chauffeur to a maniac?) but it wasn't there this year. The jungle had sucked it up with its green tentacles. We had to chop a path through creepers thicker than the arm of an octopus.

The *safari* boys began to groan and sweat. Hyacinth, our black guide, began to sweat and groan. He was a Liberian Negro educated in a French mission school, but he shed his veneer and dropped back into the primitive that trip. He pulled a lot of gourd rattles out of his kit and cooked up charms against the evil eye, and our black bearers shuffled along rolling their eyes and rattling like tar-babies out of some weird nursery.

Elizabeth Annabelle didn't mind the hubbub. She didn't mind the mosquitoes, the mud, the thorns, the everlasting heat, the hothouse orchid air that plugged the nostrils with sick-scented perfume. She sat her saddle like a carving, head up, eyes front, first to break camp, last to dismount, her thoughts only on the village that was to be our destination.

"We must get there in time, Crade. 'Five years and exactly at midnight,' the witch doctor said. We must hurry! We cannot be late!"

Stamina? Don't tell me women haven't got staying power when it comes to something like that. Mornings I'd crawl to my pony with my bones aching like teeth; sundown I'd tumble out of the saddle unhorsed like Alice's knight, but that girl remained fresh as a daisy on that worst of all possible trails.

FINALLY the charm-rattling and prayer mumbling of our woolly-headed caravan cracked my enamel.

"Stop it!" I bawled at Hyacinth, taking him by the scruff and shaking him until his teeth clacked like beans in the empty gourd that was his head. "Collect all those jujus and tamtams you've distributed among those gorillas, and stop this confounded uproar or I'll take your skeleton apart and give you to the Gueré."

Then I cursed myself when Hyacinth stopped the noise. Those boys had merely been whistling on their way past a graveyard, and now the jungle was silent as if all sound in the world had stopped and this was the cemetery where the last echoes had been interred.

We were ten days deep in that forest, and we might have gone over the edge that Columbus was afraid of. Not a sound penetrated the packed glooms walling the trail. Not a bird-call or monkey laugh. No leaf stirred. The hooves of our tried ponies crashed in the mouldy earth, and it was quiet as the devil. Even the native drums—the jungle telegraph that heralds the approach of any traveler—were silent. The hairs went up on my neck, and my stomach curdled with fear. Normally I'm not afraid of a fight, but I have a wholesome fear of the uncanny, and that absolute silence was uncanny as a candle at a séance.

And if going into that country with Elizabeth Annabelle to dig up a five-year buried doll in order to save her

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husband from a madhouse at the other end of a continent wasn't uncanny, I don't know the meaning of the word. Rage and fear fought to gain the upper hand in my tangled emotions.

I condemned myself in no uncertain terms. The futility of this horrid pilgrimage! Undoubtedly the doll had turned to dust, wouldn't be there. Suppose it was? Poor Elizabeth, clinging to this last desperate hope, running to a witch doctor where doctors of medicine had failed! I was supposed to be a scientist; should have known better than to let the girl come on this hopeless chase.

"You fool!" I cursed myself. "You ought to be in that idiot asylum. You're going to turn back tomorrow and take the girl with you."

Next morning I told Elizabeth Annabelle we could go no farther, we'd missed the trail and we'd have to go back to the coast. Then there was the devil of a scene. Do you think I could stop her? Not her! For five years she had gone through hell with Chris in that "institution." Now she told me about those five years. The visits to that asylum with its chattering corridors, its squeaking and cat-laughing inmates, its cells packed with those who were worse than the dead. The interviews with the man who stared at her without recognition. The nights when she sat alone in the window of her home, watching, praying, eyes fixed on that house of madness above the town.

If you think I could have stopped her now we were on our way, you don't credit the power of a woman like Elizabeth Annabelle fighting to save her husband from damnation. She had gone through hell for Chris in those five years, and now she was going straight to the brimstone pits to command the Devil to give back her husband's soul. She knew I was lying; knew Hyacinth had kept us to the trail. She gave me a glare that would have sent a flush up the face of an Arab slaver. I think she'd have put a bullet in me if I'd tried to stop her after we'd come this far.

"Would you deny my husband his last chance?" she scathed me. "Would you have him spend the rest of his days in a madhouse? If witchcraft could send him mad, then it can save him, too. If you're afraid, go back. I'm going to get that doll!"

SHE brushed aside my arguments as if they were pestering flies, and spurred on. I could have killed that Gueré witch doctor for dragging us back into his spiderweb with that dirty decoy. I wanted to get his neck in my hands and choke the truth about all this unhealthy Munumguru sorcery out of him. That's where my fool curiosity came in. I'd have had sense enough to stop this hopeless trek if, in the back of my soul, I hadn't been possessed with desire to learn the answer to black magic. The urge in me was stronger than logical fear.

For five years I'd subconsciously wanted to know that answer. I had to know. Was that stinking African priest with his moronic make-up and cave-man soul *really* capable of supernatural power? If a Gueré medicine man could mumble a witch-curse and send a highly intelligent young scientist into a strait-jacket, then all the scientific underpinning of my world would shake to pieces.

That gnawing question was one of the things which held me to that black pilgrimage. It was a terrible trail we followed. Hyacinth said he was taking us on a short-cut to Ga's village, and the longest way around would have

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been too short for me. We thrashed along in the undergrowth, clawing and chopping, but we couldn't make a dent in that age-old snoozing silence. There's some gray in my hair, and those last miles of utter silence are what put it there. That forest was like an animal, a huge unseen animal crouched to spring. Its breath was drawn for the attack. Peril hung in every particle of the atmosphere, and our *safari* boys fidgeted like a chorus of black cats on a tin roof.

Two days to go, the *safari* cracked up in a fight. Three blacks were stabbed, and all save Hyacinth, who was too scared to go, deserted. This calamity had no more effect on Elizabeth Annabelle than mist on marble.

"We must hurry! We must be there in time! Exactly at midnight as the priest demanded—"

And as if that wasn't enough, I'd discovered a new distraction on my own accord. This trouble had been hiding there in my blood throughout those five years, too. I'm sure it had. And it wanted only the evil and mystery of that Ivory Coast forest to bring it out.

I caught myself looking at Elizabeth Annabelle with a numbness around the heart that no man should have for the wife of a friend. Oh, it was easy enough. At first I thought it was apprehension for her safety. Then I told myself I was admiring her courage in this bath of fire.

Suddenly, alone at her side in that curst jungle, I realized I'd given my last breath for her. All very pretty, wasn't it? Poor Chris miles away in an insane asylum. Her pitiful Crusade to rescue him from that dark tower. Now her husbands' friend making eyes like a Valentine. It was an ugly thing to know about myself, and remembering the British law in such cases (no divorce from insanity) I blew up, internally combusted in terror for the girl's life, rage at Fate in general, hopeless despair.

"You're a fine specimen!" I told myself. "Let her come to this cannibal hell to satisfy your own wretched superstitions, and then work up a mess of romantic ideas where you've got no right."

And then the ugly thoughts: "But Chris is in a madhouse. She can't tie the rest of her life to that. Dr. Northgate says nothing can cure the man. He's dead—worse than dead. Why should he spoil *our* lives—"

IF that wasn't a terrible situation! It brought the cold sweat guttering on my forehead, let me tell you. Don't worry about this turning into any Hollywood triangle love story. I'm merely confessing a little secret that I learned about myself in that equatorial limberlost. I never breathed a word of it to Elizabeth. It was too mean. And it explains why, at the last, I risked my life and hers in an effort to reach a black god's *kraal* and dig up a piece of wood. You see, I had to get that doll now. I had to do anything I could to save Elizabeth Annabelle's husband for her. If there was a last chance in voodoo saving Chris, I had to take that chance. A matter of honor, if you can understand. I *had* to get that doll!

Then you can visualize me driven, as it were, by Mrs. Annabelle, Curiosity and Honor, hotfoot through the blackest forest in Africa to the gates of that Gueré village. We reached the place without porters, without luggage, with a guide too scared to be worth his salt, and what's more we got there in time. Five years to the day had passed

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since last we entered that jungle-hemmed stockade and rode among these beehive huts. Now we had an hour to spare before midnight.

An unwholesome, blood-colored moon, enormously rounded in its ascendancy, had swelled up over the jungle tops, casting over the native roofs an eld half-light. There was an erratic, secret flittering of batwings in the gloom. As we urged our steaming ponies through the outer stockade, I was conscious of a feeling of doors closing with finality behind me. There was none of the callithump and black man's hullabaloo that had greeted our visit five years ago. We hobbled our mounts at the gate and proceeded on foot up a lane awash in the unreal moonray; the village as quiet as drugged sleep.

My first thought was a prayerful relief. The village was abandoned!

Then I glimpsed a blur of black-purple muscles, the disembodied shine of teeth and eggish eyes in a shadowed doorway, and I knew I had hoped too soon. Eyes! In every ghostly doorway we passed. No sound or movement. The Gueré natives in that place had become nothing but ink-shine and rolling eyes that followed our backs up the lane like the painted stares of portraits.

I could feel those eyes watching us. That was not a pleasant feeling in a cannibal village hushed by approaching midnight deep in the African jungle. Something in that night was waiting to pounce, and in my clumsy nervousness I tried to walk in front of Elizabeth Annabelle and behind her and on all sides of her at the same time.

She kept ahead of me, though. Her face was white in the liverish lunar ray that slanted in patterns through the trees. As white as a moonflower. But her chin was high and firm as a carving in Carrara. Her gray eyes fixed straight before her, unswerving as her purpose. Silver spurs made a tiny twinkle on her riding boots as she strode, and I saw her hands were clenched. Atmosphere didn't bother that girl. Red moonlight, a jungle town locked up in spidery silence didn't phase her. Her mind was a million miles to the southward on that hideous prison where her husband's soul was chained, and I think she could have been walking on coals without knowing it just then.

For the benefit of the eyes I could feel augering into my spine, I made a show of upholstering my armaments. I unhooked the Colt at my belt, snapped off the safety. I unlimbered the Lüger pistol shoulder-holstered under my coat. Still the village made no stir. The lane we walked was empty, echoing only our boots. Not a dog let go. Something touched my arm as we rounded a bend between the close-jammed grass hovels, and I jerked around like a marionette. It was only Hyacinth crowding me for companionship.

CHAPTER V.

THE FETISH.

HYACINTH had wilted. Literally. He didn't like this Gueré stronghold, and he expressed his distaste by knocking his teeth together. His lower lip was loose and shaking, his eyes were agates swiveling around in his chocolate face, doubtless hunting the cooking pots.

"Pull yourself together!" I warned him with a nudge as hard as a kick. "Pull yourself together or these man-

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eaters will be pulling you apart. There's the witch doctor's house in the middle of that square. When we get there, you go up to the door of that *rondoval* and order Ga to come out!"

I caught up with Elizabeth and tried to square my shoulders. She'd forgotten me. Her eyes were on the big cone-shaped house centered in the square.

"It seems like yesterday," she was whispering. "Like yesterday—"

Then she looked at me. "We're here, Crade. We must not fail to do as the witch doctor commands. It is nearly midnight?"

I consulted my strap watch. "Fifteen minutes yet. Elizabeth, I— Look here, Elizabeth—"

I couldn't tell her what I wanted to tell her. I didn't know what I wanted to say. Emotions of all sorts tangled up in my throat and throttled me. I was on the point of telling her she must go back and stay with the horses, I'd do the doll-digging, when I remembered there were no *safari* porters to keep her company and she had to stay with me. A gargle from Hyacinth stopped my mouth, and the girl caught my arm fiercely.

"Look. There's the witch doctor, now—"

It was Ga, all right. No need for our guide to speak a summons. Bow-legged, doddery in his outlandish grass hoopskirts, the Gueré priest came squeaking and gobbling out of his front door like a hairy tarantula scuttling to nail its webbed victims. Five years had done this Zeus of the jungle no good, save to add new layers of egg-paint, reek and garbage to his costume and heighten the degradation of his ritual.

At us he came, wheeling and curveting in a parody hornpipe, whirling his shinbone baton over his head like a Highlander whirls a drumstick, feathers ruffed, anklets, bracelets and prayer beads a-jangle. The same beak-nosed toucan mask with its popping goggles. Wattles going under his chin.

Anthropology is the study of mankind, and I'd run across some revolting specimens in my work, but this carnivorous creature had them all whipped. Alongside this beast the Neanderthal man was a gentleman; and all at once, face to face again with this slavering savage, face to face with this Negroid claptrap and witless jujuism, a convulsion of rage seized me.

That Elizabeth should have come all these hellish miles at the whimsy of this freak! That the unhappy and desperate girl should have backtracked into the horrors of five years ago to meet this flesh-eating ghoul on his own suggestion! For five years of slow agony, her husband in a madhouse, the wonderful woman at my side had pinned her last hope on *this!* It only wanted the sight of that black priest to tell me his Munumguru power was a fake, a legend, a fabric of sun-smitten imagination. I was sick. Sick to the heart. I wanted to get her away from the sight, the smell of that fiend.

"Tell him," the girl was calling low-voiced to Hyacinth, "tell him we've come for the doll. Tell him we've come to beg the forgiveness of his gods and take the Munumguru doll as promised us—"

GOBBLE, gobble, gobble! The wretch in front of us spouted and waltzed, and I howled at Hyacinth to translate the girl's commands. Yes, I was bound to see it through.

"Speak!" I snarled at our guide.

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"We've come for the juju doll. White woman's husband—Munumguru curse—five years ago—doll at midnight—tell him—"

Hyacinth's palsied lips worked my demand into Gueré dialect, and the witch doctor stopped bouncing and stood listening to the message. It seemed a long time before he replied. It seemed a couple of years. A couple of years while that black village slept with its eyes wide open and the moon-bloodied night waited for its next move.

I could hear the girl beside me breathing quickly; Hyacinth's swallows of fear; it was so quiet my wrist watch made a sound. The dial stood at ten of twelve. Five years ago this Gueré hobgoblin had spat his curse at Christian Annabelle as he planted a chunk of carved wood in his dooryard. Five years ago we'd marched on up the trail with that African gibberish drumming at our ears. And five days after that Chris Annabelle had been babbling like a chimpanzee and Sir Jim lay sacrificed to mania in his tent. Somewhere off behind that moon-soaked forest wall there was a grave. Somewhere leagues away a young medical student prowled his asylum cell.

I glared at Ga, and it was all I could do to keep my fingers from leaping for his throat. Sweat poured out of me as I waited for his words to come. Elizabeth's anguished breathing. Hyacinth's pelican-like gulps. The night ticking itself away. Then, with the abruptness of an explosion, the witch doctor flung up his arms, opened his dodo's beak and fired a blast of words at our interpreter.

Hyacinth didn't fancy playing interpreter, either. Sweat sprouted in greasy blue globes on his forehead and ran down his skin like cocoa, as he translated the outblast into macaronic pidgin-French.

"He responds that he is Ga, greatest of all sorcerers. It is he who destroys his enemies with the curse of Munumguru."

"We know all that," I gritted. "What about the juju, the doll?"

Hyacinth lifted a shaking finger to point at the door of the big clay-walled witch-house. "He says the doll yet remains in its tomb."

"Did you tell him we'd come to remove the curse from this woman's husband?" The words sounded like monkey-talk in my mouth. It was terrible, this farce at Elizabeth's expense. "Did you tell him that?"

Hyacinth had to swallow his black Adam's apple in a struggle for translation, a gulp that screwed his features as if with colic. As he spoke he kept running his eyes in circles around the village, darting from silent door to silent door, this way, that way, like fish trying to escape a bowl.

"He says, master, you must dig up doll at midnight to release white man from the madness. When the doll is unearthed the Munumguru will fly away, the soul will return to white man's body. But the hour and the minute must come together as instantly as the birth of sound when the fist strikes a drum. Midnight it must be. A minute before or a minute afterward will be too late, and Munumguru will stay forever."

SHADES of Shakespeare, if I didn't see the trick then! The fly in that quack doctor's ointment. Do you remember that beautiful piece of pettifogging in "The Merchant of Venice"? One pound of flesh—not an atom more, not an atom less, or Shylock loses? Well, this African cardinal

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had us on the same artifice. Exactly at midnight we must unearth his rotten totem, not a minute before, not a clock-tick after, or the "cure" would not come off.

Elizabeth Annabelle wrung a cry from colorless lips. "Then we must hurry, be ready at the burying place. Oh," her fingers crushed together in mine, "we will try to meet these conditions. We cannot fail now!"

"I'll get it," I promised her through my teeth. "I'll have my hands on that doll at the tick of midnight, or I'll—"

Or I'd what? There was another fly in this witch doctor's ointment. A whole spear-throwing, hatchet-swinging, man-eating tribe of them. Hyacinth let out an ashen-lipped gulp.

"But, master—"

"What now?" I invited.

He gestured at Ga, squatting among the moonbeams in his glue and feathers. "He says you can have this doll on one—how do you say it?—at one price. He says you take doll only if white lady," the guide's eyes threatened to unsocket themselves from his head, "only if white lady consent to stay with witch doctor, *oui?* You give Ga beautiful white lady—*Sacré!*—he give you juju doll."

I hit him! Word of honor, I hit that poppy-eyed witch doctor a smash on the beak that broke his toucan-headed devil-mask into forty pieces and his flat African nose-bones with it. *He* wanted Elizabeth! That was the last rotten straw. I didn't want Elizabeth Annabelle to hear that reeking proposition, and I didn't give her the chance to hear it. For all I knew, in her present state of mind she might accept the hideous offer in the hope of saving Chris. Smash! My fist closed the interview then and there. Ga's clownface burst screeching; blood umbrellaed in moonlight; I nailed him in the stomach with a dropkick, and he flew over backwards, lit in dust and rolled like a shot ostrich. Silence splintered into two thousand screaming echoes, and hell was there for a payment!

FUNNY the variety of things you'll register on your eyeball in that second before a train, a hurricane or a lightning bolt hits you. I saw old Ga ricochet off the clay wall of his house, bounce a cropper into a tree and slam down to his face howling like a siren. I saw doors come to life under cone-shaped grass roofs; saw those Gueré warriors come racing out like black fire horses. Hyacinth was a striped shirt-tail streaking around the corner of a shadow. I saw by my strap watch it was five minutes to twelve, and in the same kaleidoscope I saw Elizabeth Annabelle whirl at me with horror-filled eyes, then spin and go like an antelope, bee-line for the door of that witch house.

She hadn't said anything to me. Not a word. But the look she dealt me stung deep as the lash of a quirt. I'd lost my head, and I'd smashed her last hope to save Chris. Plain as day she said that; and then, with all hell breaking loose, I went berserk.

I guess so. Plain and fancy berserk. I screamed at the girl to come back, but she wouldn't turn. She wouldn't have turned if she'd heard me. The village burst ablaze in a pyrotechnic of torch-flares and the night was squalling louder than a million cats. Grass doors on all sides were loosing shiny-hided savages. Woolly topknots. Grinning mouths of filed teeth.

The village was laid out like a wheel; stockade fence on the rim, lanes converging like crooked spokes to the

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square where the witch house sat as its hub. The Gueré came pouring up the lanes in war-whooping swarms. A spike-studded war club kited over my helmet and crashed against the witch house wall. Stones, darts, arrows began to sing and croon in the air.

Crash! Crash! That was the Colt kicking in my hand, jolting my shoulder in its socket. I'd been saving those first shots. Saving them for a long time. I'd saved those bullets in the box that I'd stored in the attic of my mind, the box that was open at last and spilling all the terrors of Pandora. Do you know the party I'd saved them for? I'll tell you. Those first two shots slammed smack into the midriff of that mess of feathers, filth and unholiness named Ga. I shot that black monster where he lay, and sent him back to the Devil who had spawned him.

How those savages howled when they saw Ga was dead. Man, how they yelled! The greatest and most powerful of sorcerers lay in the dust like a punctured lizard, and this time he'd lost his face for good. For half a second—the merest split of a tick—those Gueré cannibals were shocked to a standstill. It gave me a break to yank the Lüger from my coat, and reach Elizabeth Annabelle's side.

LEAPING, bounding, raving and screaming, the blacks were coming at us from seven directions, and what do you think that girl was doing? If I live to be a Methuselah I'll never forget what that girl was doing while the legions of Hades were coming at us. I tell you, she'd rushed to the doorway of old Ga's witch house, the doorway where the medicine man had buried his ebony image, and she was down on her knees digging into the heel-pounded earth with her nails. Yes, digging! Digging for a juju doll buried five years ago in that filthy clay. Breaking her fingernails in the packed earth. Tears streaming quicksilver on the white of her cheeks, and her back turned, oblivious to the kinky wolfpack storming across the square.

"It's nearly midnight!" She turned her face to sob at me. She didn't seem to see the gun that was flashing in my fist. "Help me! Help me, Crade—"

Can you picture her there in the door of that African juju house crying up at me? Can you see her on her knees, clods flying from her fingers, her shoulders struggling, lips white as snow from the effort of her labors, a loose sheaf of hair streaking black-gold down her temples, digging in the dirt while all damnation roared from a dozen alley-mouths behind her? Lord, what a scene that was!

There were miracles afoot that night, and here was the first of them. A miracle that, without knowing where to dig (the earth-beaten doorway to that jungle house was wide, and the doll burial had been five years ago) her hand should have gone like a divining rod to the place where the wooden totem was planted. Of the four miracles which were to end this West African Witch's Sabbath, I think that was the greatest of all.

The second miracle was our not being cut to pieces in the rush. "Elizabeth!" I screamed down at her. "For God's sake—they're coming—run!" I was dancing like a loon, the automatic whanging an outblast as I squeezed the trigger, and I don't suppose she heard.

"Run, run!" I squalled, dropping beside her in an attempt to drag her to her feet. Her earthy knuckles struck me off.

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"It's almost midnight! The doll! We must get the doll—"

I fired wildly with the Lüger, pot-shooting from the hip at black wolves. We were caught there in the doorway of Ga's parsonage, no escape, while his ink-skinned parishioners closed in from all directions, baying and squalling as they charged. Tall ape-men with faces of hot tar, eyes scarlet with the moon in them, wild wigs of buttered hair, naked as beasts but for girdles of monkey-tails, garlands of cowrie shell, elephant-hide shields and strings of leopard-teeth. Some of them wore brass rings in their nostrils, the sort of little rings children try to catch on a merry-go-round.

And for a minute the mob whirled around the witch house not unlike a carousel, deafening the air with a discordant, chanting din. I fired fast shots at nose-rings, and the man-eaters screamed and whooped like tigers in limbo. The dust stood up in biscuit-colored piles. The red darkness quivered and rang. Rang with the tattoo of my Lüger and quivered to the *ping* of a thousand missiles cutting the moonbeams.

Spears, bludgeons, war clubs, darts, assegais, stone mallets whistled over the girl and me in a thickening blizzard. A dart smote into the crown of my helmet and stood up as a pompom. Arrows pierced my coat sleeves, ripped my side pockets, tore the lining from an armpit. Things sailed into the blackness of the witch house and there was a smashing as of crockery within. Mauls, javelins and hammers rattled off the clay doorsill. A mallet struck the girl's left shoulder and she cried in pain, swaying where she knelt.

All this happened in less time than the telling, and I remember wondering why the mob didn't crash over us like a tidal wave, why it hung back in a circling Apache-dance that maelstromed around the house but kept its distance. As I squeezed the last bullet from my Lüger, it occurred to me that these murderers were afraid of Ga's cottage. That house was probably taboo to the natives, a holy of holies where the medicine man had cooked up his fiendish prescriptions. Clutching out, I yanked Elizabeth Annabelle to her feet, whirled her over that evil threshold.

"We'll stay in here. They won't dare come after us—"

HOLY of holies was right! Coals were red eyes under a great iron kettle centered in the floor, and they made the only light. But it was light enough to see why those African leopard-men didn't want to follow. The witch doctor's house to end all witch doctor's houses! A catacomb would have been cozy alongside that enclosure. Bones and rubbish ankle-deep on the dirt floor. Yellow skulls like reasty flower pots on shelves. The kettle bubbled and chuckled over the expiring coals, sickening the smokiness with an odor of rancid cookery. And there was a corner table, a crude sort of altar heaped high with little ebony dolls of every description, and a dried human foot hung above the altar, and did a noiseless sort of tap-dance in the wind.

"We've lost our chance to get the doll. It's too late. We've lost our chance to save Chris—"

Elizabeth Annabelle put her face in her hands and sobbed. I was trying to stop a nosebleed, service the Lüger and shield her from the door at the same time, and I had to stare at her.

"We've lost our chance to get the doll—"

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Not much! Anything that girl wanted or thought she wanted, she was going to have. Bedlam tripled outside, and the miserable doll house began to shake under the blows of hurled missiles that threatened to come clean through the walls. I jammed a fresh clip in the Lüger, swung at the door. I'd come through high water and hell, risked my life and everything I held dear (and Elizabeth Annabelle was everything I held dear!) to lay my hands on that chunk of wood, and there remained a minute in which to do it. I think I was madder than Christian Annabelle ever was, right then.

"I'll get it," I screamed at the girl. "Stay in here! Don't move! I'll get the doll—"

Diving at the door, I sent a roaring broadside into the square, and then on the outer threshold I dropped belly-whacker to the ground and began to work the pistol with my right hand while I worked the hole Elizabeth had started with my left. I didn't tell my right hand what my left hand was doing, either. I dug.

I went left-handed into that little excavation as De Lesseps went single-handed at the Suez Canal. Dirt smudged in my hair, mouth, eyes. Talk about trenching in! Talk about Culebra Cut! The blacks thought I'd tripped and fallen in the doorway, and they gathered themselves together for the bargain-counter rush. When they saw I was digging a hole, they shrieked in surprise. For a minute that surprise took the better edge off their marksmanship, and they were throwing spears into everything but me. I'd like to have a picture of myself outflung in that doorway, pawing in a hole with one hand, shooting cannibals with the other. With the corner of an eye I could see the second-hand of my wrist watch ticking around toward midnight. It wanted an ending, that fantasy, and it got one.

MY fingers pulled up nothing save handfuls of earth. A war club the size of a prize summer squash smashed the crown of my helmet. The bullets gave out in the Lüger, and the Gueré were on me. Feet lit on my neck-nape, driving my face into the dirt. A ton landed on my shoulder blades. I was suffocating, trampled, buried under a greasy pile-up of black flesh, drowning in sweat-stench, steamrolled at the bottom of a writhing, pounding tangle of fists, legs, shins, talons, nose-hoops, teeth.

Listen, those Gueré savages were tearing me to pieces. You've heard of the Human Leopard Society? That batch must have been a local chapter. They were tearing me to pieces, and I was tearing the ground to pieces, God's truth. My left hand was still in that hole. My fingers chewed into the clay. My nails splintered on something hard.

I got the doll! My arm was being wrenched off at the shoulder, but my fist came out of the ground with something in it, and I saw through flashes of light and shadow that I clutched a chunk of wood in my hand, a piece of carved ebony, a doll without a head.

At the same time I saw something else. The strap watch on my left wrist. It was four minutes after twelve!

Trip-hammers were riveting nails of pain through my skull, but my last thought was a flashing wonder if I had dug up the prize too late, and the thought blew me up. An explosion that almost sent me to my feet. I don't know how I blasted out from under that wolf-pack, but I threw them off me as Gulliver might have discarded midgets. Only I'm sure I had nothing

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to do with it. I think they climbed off the band wagon because of the foul object in my hand. I suppose Ga's little dolls were no end taboo.

Somehow I tore a fat club from a pair of hands, and I slashed at those woolly topknots with the sort of last strength that sits dying men up in their beds. Village, jungle, sky, cannibals and moon spun in spirals. Red, green, yellow, purple. I could taste blood in my throat and smell burning smoke acrid in my nostrils. Sulphurous coils winding around in the night like curly aërial snakes. Black faces beginning to glow. Then I fancied I could hear Elizabeth screaming, and the spiteful cracking of her pistol. In that villainous pandemonium her face was suddenly bright over my shoulder; she was standing illuminated in the doorway, gun spitting and crashing in her hand; I screeched to tell her I had the doll.

Sparks fell in a shower around her helmet—the witch house afire! Smoke boiled outward in a cannon-like gust, spouted out of the grass roof, burst into a tumult of orange flags. The whole roof went in a roar. Those black fiends had set the taboo-house on fire, and they had us where they wanted us now! Hugging my club, I flung myself to Elizabeth's side and stood in a bath of heat while the pinwheeling savages charged.

Elizabeth screamed. Something struck her throat, left a fire-brand scar, and she fell. At the same time my ankles gave out and I went down. The sky came down like a collapsing boiler plant. I could hear it hitting the stamped earth around us, *bam, bam, bam,* sounding loud as gunfire. A black ape was leaping at me with pointed lance to pin me pig-fashion, but instead of sticking me he stopped in mid career, buckled at the knees, staggered. A piece of falling sky must have hit him on the head, for the spear was a squib in his elbow, he twisted into an "S" and spilled down like a ruined chimney.

A great chorus of screams assailed the night. Not war whoops. Screams. *Bam, bam, bam, bam!* A loudening drumroll rataplaning out of nowhere, rolling louder and louder through the dust. A sheet of horizontal flame swept the village square, and somewhere in the sky an imaginary bugle was tootling. The Last Trump!

CHAPTER VI.

JUDGMENT.

WELL, if it wasn't the last, it certainly was next to last, no doubt about that. There was the third West African miracle. The arrival of those Negroes who wore khaki shorts and khaki tunics and Lebel rifles and minstrel-show grins and hats like red felt smokestacks on their heads. A medal to those French Tirailleurs. A medal to the hysterical French administrator who came hurrying through those God-sent soldiers to tell us he had sent them, himself. *Sacré!* The thought of Madam Annabelle traveling into Gueré territory had robbed him of his sleep. He had sent out a hurry call and decided to follow with a flying column. *Tiens, oui* and *alors!* Now would monsieur and madam please be willing to go home?

Willing to go home? They couldn't get me out of the Ivory Coast any too soon. They stuck me together with strips of adhesive tape and bundled me onto a stretcher. But it was worth every twinge of it. It was worth blood poisoning in my thumb and contusions

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in my scalp. You should have seen Elizabeth Annabelle's eyes when I handed her the little wooden doll.

"We got it in time," I whispered gallantly. "Something to remember me by."

I didn't tell her about the extra four minutes. For all I knew my watch might have been wrong. Besides, she was too ill for any sort of nonsense. Exhausted and feverish from that cruel blow on her throat. The soldiers fashioned her a palanquin and she lay back white and smiling. I could have wept at the way she hugged that piece of black wood to her breast.

The fourth miracle was waiting for us when, three weeks later, we reached the mouth of the Sassandra. Remember, it took us three weeks to reach the coast.

Our yacht captain was waiting with a wireless message in his hand. It had come the day before, he said. The captain had been worried about us, and against Mrs. Annabelle's strict orders, he had radioed our position to Dr. Northgate. This was the doctor's reply.

> Return at once. Christian Annabelle completely recovered. He is asking for Elizabeth, and hospital preparing to sign his release.

I thought that radiogram would conclude the whole incredible affair, but it doesn't end the story.

THIS story could only end on such a night as flashed and poured around our yacht as it fingered its careful passage into its home harbor. My, how it stormed that night! Great seas piled down on the Cape, our town was extinguished in the gale, the harbor light a blur at Land's End. We dropped our anchor thankfully at 8 P.M., and at 8.10 Dr. Northgate was aboard.

Cape blowing wet in the gusts, hat streaming, he stepped from the harbor master's launch and swung up the gangway, and I was more than glad to see him. I'd wirelessed him to board us ahead of the regular quarantine officials, for I was worried about Elizabeth Annabelle and considered her too ill to be moved ashore in such weather.

Throughout a rough voyage down she had kept to the berth in her stateroom, and I was uneasy about that bruise on her throat. Confined to her quarters, the girl had refused my fumbling solicitude. She was running a low fever, and I was afraid the strain of that expedition and its remarkable outcome had proved too much for her.

"She claims she's perfectly all right," I told the doctor, "and wants to go ashore immediately, yet she's been too weak to stay on deck. I'm afraid she's seriously ill."

We stood in the mahogany corridor before Elizabeth Annabelle's stateroom. In mid bay the yacht was rolling heavily at anchorage; above the shout of the gale the bell buoys clanged mournfully, otherwise we might have been far at sea. Dr. Northgate braced himself in the passage and shook water from hat, gloves and kit. I had not seen him in over five years, now, and I was abruptly aware of great weariness in the elderly man's features, white at the temples, gray in the Vandyke. One passes from middle age to age so swiftly. I saw the doctor was no longer elderly, but old.

His sharp, bright eyes behind the pince-nez glasses dealt me a quick, searching scrutiny as I spoke; then his face polished up with a professional joviality that seemed, under the circumstances, a little too forced. You know

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doctors. He put his hand on the stateroom door, moving the latch.

"Here's the best medicine I know for Elizabeth," he boomed heartily. "Christian Annabelle is sane." He chuckled loudly to send his voice beyond the door. "I tell you, Crade, it's miraculous. Happened suddenly, almost overnight he came back—memory, reason, lucid as sanity can be. He talked with me about the hospital, the elephant hunt, wanted to know where Sir Jim was—eh, by Jove, he thought he'd been asleep—wondered if he'd been knocked unconscious in an accident. He asked to see his wife at once."

The doctor's words went on booming around in the passage, and his nose-glasses gleamed like jewelry in the gray sag of his face. He pumped my hand. He clapped my shoulder. "The lawyers are up there right now signing Chris's papers of release. It's amazing, what? Absolutely! Nothing like it in the records of the hospital. They're dismissing him tonight at nine o'clock, and we're to be there to take him home—"

I WAS prepared for that news by the doctor's previous radiogram, but I was not prepared for what happened on the echo of his spoken word. Booming out the heartening speech, the old doctor had opened Elizabeth Annabelle's door a fraction, and he had scarcely uttered his message when something struck the floor in the stateroom beyond the door. *Sluff!* The sound of a body hitting the carpet. A sodden fall.

What happened after that occurred with such stunning contingency and was so totally unforeseen that I can recall it only as a series of unreal episodes, a vague shadow-play staged in the mahogany and polish of a dim-lit stateroom, the blurt of frightened speech undertoned by the wail of salt wind and the crash of spray at porthole glass. We were in the room at a bound, and Elizabeth Annabelle lay in the center of the floor, eyes closed as if in sleep. She had only just risen from her bed; slipped into a lacy negligee and apparently started for the corridor. Upturned to the warmth of the overhead lights, her face was white as starched linen framed in the black-gold shawl of her hair.

I think I hollered that she'd fainted, and before I could stir the doctor had her in his arms and carried her to the berth. To this day I can see the way his fingers adjusted themselves to the girl's white wrist, then galvanized as if shot with electric jolts. I can still see his face as he whirled from the bed, his corded cheeks glazed with rain-water, lips twisting, glasses flashing a stricken glare.

"This girl is dying, Crade!"

I suppose I howled. The stateroom bleared and spun. Dr. Northgate was flinging off his cape. Hands flying into his kit, grabbing at bottles and vials, stethoscope, medical instruments. Fingers measuring a spoonful of this, a drop of that. Liquor smoking in a glass. A sip forced to the girl's colorless lips. I fancy I stood staring in that sort of paralysis which characterizes all laymen in a crisis. Dying, dying, Elizabeth dying? Great God! the doctor must be mistaken. He *had* to be! The girl had been ill but she couldn't be dying! Why, just yesterday the stewards had packed her things to go ashore. Elizabeth couldn't die!

"What's the matter with her?"

He was stooped over the bed with his stethoscope, and he shouted back at me without turning his head.

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"Crade, I can't save her now. It comes like lightning, I tell you. So rare we don't know how to combat it. Must have contracted it up there in that jungle. It's fatal, Crade. Always fatal. She's dying—"

Then he dropped the stethoscope and turned to face me, hands shaking at his sides. "It's poltergeistal fever."

I raged at Dr. Northgate then. I caught him by the lapels and yelled into his face. He couldn't let her die like this, without warning. Not after what she'd done. "You *can't* let her die!"

Can you hear his voice coming back at me through my bleating? Low from his chest, deep as the drum-beat of doom? "I can't save her, old man. Minute I saw her I knew. Last stages. Poltergeistal fever. Dying—"

But then can you hear a voice from the bed behind us, a voice that was so frail as to seem without substance, barely audible above the roars of our own frightened lungs and the outer whoop of the storm?

"Dying? No, no, I mustn't."

TEARS were running on the old physician's cheeks as he turned to kneel at her side, and I stood at the wall fairly wringing my hands. I don't know what I did. Somewhere out in the night the ship's bell clingclonged the half hour, but all time had ceased in my world and everything lay around me in ruin. I couldn't look at that white face so frail on the pillow, the gray eyes enormous, almost black, staring up at us in terror and appeal. One never thinks of beauty dying. Sudden death never overtakes one's friends. Poltergeistal fever? What was this monstrous malady that was robbing this girl of life in the very moment of her happiness?

The doctor reached gently to support her head, and her hair fell like black gold through his gnarled fingers. Her lips, even as we watched, turned the color of ice. Two transparent spots of pink bloomed unnaturally on the snow of her cheek, and her whisper seemed to come from the bottom of a far-away well.

"I'm so weak—I can hardly see—Crade!—Doctor!—I mustn't die—"

"No, no!" Dr. Northgate panted. "You're not dying, Elizabeth! You must have fainted, that's all. You're going to be fine—"

"I am dying, then," she answered with sudden clarity, a smile that faded as soon as it came to her lips. "I heard what you said out in the corridor, doctor. Then I heard your voice, too—after I fainted. I'm dying, you said—please don't deceive me now—doctor, quickly, I must tell—I can't die with this—I must tell everything—*everything*—"

"Please don't speak, Elizabeth!" The doctor's face was twisted beyond recognition with pain. He was trying to smooth her forehead, trying with all those bedside tricks to reassure the girl, but it was too late for comfort now. Whiter by the moment, Elizabeth Annabelle moved her lips on words that seemed to come from a dream.

"I can't die with this—I've got to tell. It's about Chris. The night he killed Sir Jim. Doctor—Sir Jim—Sir Jim was—*murdered*—"

"Wait a minute—" I blurted; but Elizabeth was speaking, and all at once we were listening like fools to that dying whisper. God, how we listened! "Chris told me," she whispered up at us, "he told me that night after he'd killed Jim Harned. He was tied up in the truck, and I was sitting with

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him, trying to talk with him. You were up forward and couldn't overhear."

Dr. Northgate groaned, "Elizabeth, what are you—"

"I'm going to tell you what Chris said," she murmured faintly. "I saw him look at me—suddenly his eyes were different — clear — bright. 'I'm as sane as you are,' he said. 'I killed Jim Harned.' He squeezed my arm. 'I'm pretending to be insane,' he said. 'Don't be afraid, they'll never find out. I know enough psychiatry—I can fool the doctors and their examinations—'"

ELIZABETH ANNABELLE'S face was icy in the frame of the pillow, and her eyes grew so wide and black that I cried out in fear. She didn't see me there. I don't think she saw the doctor. She was looking back on that long-ago night when we'd left Jim Harned behind us and started our run for home.

"That's what Chris told me. I asked him why he had killed Sir Jim. Money, he said. He'd lost at the races. Thousands in investments. Money he'd borrowed without my knowledge from Sir Jim. It was awful to hear him talking. He told me I'd inherit Sir Jim's millions, then we'd be rich. I was to pay off the debts, then—then he would stay in the asylum feigning insanity—for five years he'd stay in the asylum—no one would know. Then he would pretend to be suddenly cured and—walk out free—rich with Sir Jim's fortune — nobody would know—"

Dr. Northgate's hands shook on the girl's lifeless arm. He had to whisper, too. "But why didn't you tell us, Elizabeth?"

She moaned, "I was afraid. He said if I told anybody he—he would kill all of you. Do away with all of us, he said, and nobody could stop him. It was so diabolical! I was terribly frightened. You see," she gasped, "I didn't know but that was all part of his—his insanity. Maybe he was insane while he was saying those awful things. It was after the priest had buried the Munumguru doll—and mad people always claim they're sane. I couldn't testify against my own husband," Elizabeth Annabelle whispered, choking on a sob. "First I—I had to *know*—"

"It's all right, Elizabeth," Dr. Northgate said in his throat. He took the girl's white fingers in a heavy hand. "You love Chris—"

"And I had to know the truth," she gasped. "When the doctors at the asylum pronounced Chris insane, why—there was only one way I could find out. If I waited five years—if I went back to get that doll—then the Munumguru curse, the atonement would be fulfilled. Chris told me he was only pretending insanity — to cover his murder—going to stay in the asylum five years—but now that we've got the doll—if it *isn't* Munumguru—"

Her voice was drowned by an explosion from the doctor's beard. "So!" Whirling from the bed, Dr. Northgate grabbed me by the sleeve, seemed to tower and grow, face swelling, suffused purple, eyes kindling with flinty, savage lights. All the age was gone in that instant of revelation, shed like a cloak. Head outthrust, muscles jutting at the sides of his throat, the doctor pinned me against the stateroom wall. His fist was a knotty maul shaking in the lamplight above the iron thatch of his head.

"You heard that, Crade? Five years I've waited to catch those words.

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Five years! You heard them, by Heaven, and you're a witness! I've got him at last, by God! I've got that murderer where I want him!"

The room was roaring, spun at my eyes. "But there's Elizabeth," I struck him aside. This was no time for vituperations. A girl was dying—

"Rubbish!" the doctor bellowed. "You think I'd have the beastly bedside manner to let her know it if she was? There's no such thing as poltergeistal fever," he shouted at the girl. "I fooled you with autosuggestion and an opiate. Easy enough when you'd fainted from excitement. You're not dying, poor child, you're nothing worse than seasick! And 'poltergeist' is a word of German origin. Means a haunt. For five years, Elizabeth, you've been haunted, and by Heaven, I knew it all the time!"

I COULDN'T look at the bed. She was sitting upright with the covers pulled to her throat, and no onlooker could have seen into her eyes at such a moment. I was the sick one in that stateroom. Paralysis had me. I couldn't have moved if the world had hit a star. Nor would I have heard the explosion with Dr. Northgate's voice cannon-crashing through my head.

"You hear me, Crade?" he was thundering. "A man can fool the psychiatrists, especially if he's a brilliant young medical student with brains and ambition—too many brains and too much ambition—but it takes a pretty good man to deceive his wife. Chris Annabelle knew how to fake insanity before the alienists, but he knew he'd never fool Elizabeth.

"No more did he fool *me!* Remember the morning we found him playing in the mud. I said there was nothing wrong with the man. He thought he could trick me with that Munumguru nonsense because I once said there might be something in it. Deliberately he outraged that filthy voodoo priest so the man would put the curse on him. Fine plot, all right. Make us all think he was under a spell when he stabbed Sir Jim. But you can't easily deceive a scientist who's spent a lifetime studying the human mind.

"I read greed in Annabelle's mind. Avarice and ruthlessness. I let him spend five years in the asylum because I thought he might break down and confess. As good, if not worse, than prison. Besides, he might have bamboozled the courtroom alienists. And he did deceive those fools at the hospital. Ha! Then he knew his wife would try to exhume that damned voodoo doll—a splendid chance to execute his spurious recovery and make us believe it was all Munumguru. Munumguru, bah! He's up there right now waiting for the doctors to release him!"

In the stateroom door, Dr. Northgate turned. "Sorry to scare you with a death-scene, but I had to have that confession. Your husband is a brute and a cunning murderer, Elizabeth. Killed my best friend in the coldest sort of blood. He broke my heart, too. You've done your best, and I had to do mine. I've got to reach the asylum before they turn him loose. Crade, you summon the police!"

IN the shore-going launch I stood alone in the stern and flung out an arm toward the sea. Lightning clattered down a dizzy aërial staircase, and I watched a headless ebony doll go spinning into outer darkness, watched it go with a curse that should have sent it to limbo.

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Not long afterwards the doctor, the police captain and I were clacking down a whitewashed corridor where internes scurried and nurses stared.

Men in gray uniforms clung at cage doors as we passed, hooting and catcalling, snarling and laughing like circus animals.

Then we were standing before the bars of a brilliantly lighted hospital room where two uniformed guards were holding against the wall a struggling gray figure, and the air reeked of chemicals. A third guard hovered by uncertainly with a sort of corset in his hands.

"What the devil!" The cry burst from Dr. Northgate; and a lean hospital doctor in surgeon's white, who had been barking orders at the guards, turned a monocle at the door, glared anger at our intrusion. Next minute he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Dr. Northgate, by gad! I say—you've come to discharge Annabelle? I don't know what to say to you, sir! He was perfectly fit this afternoon! Sane as could be. I tell you, the whole staff is—"

"What," Dr. Northgate panted, "has happened?"

The hospital doctor shook his head. "We had him in the discharging room, sir, packed up, ready to leave. Not an hour ago, it was. He seemed absolutely normal, right as rain! I asked him to sign the usual documents and handed him my fountain pen. Gad! Quick as a flash he—he was gone! Mentally, sir! As sudden as that! Raving mad!"

The hospital doctor lifted his hand in a gesture of finality, motioned at the corner where the guards wrestled to corset the struggling gray figure. Staring, Dr. Northgate clutched the steel grille before us, and his knuckles yellowed and swelled.

"Are you sure?" he whispered. "Are you *sure?*"

"Totally insane," the other repeated huskily.

"Good God!" When he backed from the grating to turn on us, Dr. Northgate's face was like bone. His voice shook. "We won't want Annabelle now," he told the police captain, "and we won't tell his wife. Five years—five years in this asylum have driven him mad!"

I caught one glimpse of Christian Annabelle's face, and I was never to see it again. I wouldn't have known him. There were bandages on his eyes.

We left that asylum and its "monkey-house" echoes in a hurry, and drove downhill in one of the blackest nights I have ever known. Africa, too, might have suddenly gone blind. There seemed but one light left in the world. Far out in the midnight of the bay, one clean, white glimmer in the stateroom window of a yacht.

EPILOGUE.

CRADE ended his story with a sigh, and stood slowly out of his chair. Our smoke-room seemed to have emptied of all sound. The thread across the porthole, the black thread of Africa, had thickened into the definite contours of a shoreline. We were drawing in. Land was in the air.

I poured myself a long one and tried not to watch the anthropologist as he moved across the floor to stand at the open port and gaze, hands locked behind his back. Presently Crade spoke.

"D'you wonder I wouldn't bring my wife back here? I'll only stay long enough to settle up his estate. She wanted to come, but I'm leaving her

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in America where the laws are different."

His locked fingers tightened together. "You see," he went on quietly, "Christian Annabelle died in that asylum last winter, raving as he died. What incredible punishment! What a self-inflicted penalty for a crime! But there's a piece missing from this story, and I don't like it. A piece I'll never be able to fill in."

"You mean—Africa?"

"Something like that," his tone was strained. He turned from the porthole, shoulders lifted. "Listen. Christian Annabelle didn't murder Sir Jim until —until *after* that Gueré priest buried that doll! That black witch doctor cursed him with Munumguru; told him he'd go mad. Aren't *all* murderers mad? And in the end—didn't old Ga promise us Chris Annabelle would lose his mind for good if we didn't get that cursed juju image five years to the day it was buried and at midnight?"

"But he went insane from hiding himself in that asylum," I could understand. "Five years in such a place would turn any man's mind."

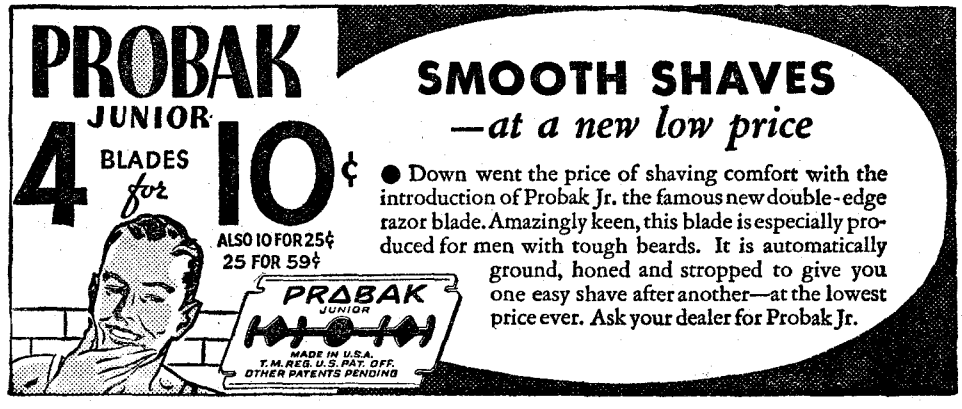
Crade dropped his voice a notch, and the land-freighted breeze from the porthole seemed to chill. "But he *was* mad in the end," he pointed out, "just as that witch doctor said. And what I'd like to know is, did I get that Munumguru doll in time? Was I four minutes late when I clawed it from the ground? Or did I lay hold of it exactly at midnight? Did I get that doll in time—"

When he turned to the porthole again, I knew he was seeing a jungle village black with red torch-light, an old toucan-headed priest braying incantations, a little wooden doll in a grave, and shadows weaving to the thump of bone-beaten drums. Centuries ago the Greeks knew of such doings. They said: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad."

But the West African Gueré had a word for it. *Munumguru!*

THE END

THEODORE ROSCOE is one of ARGOSY'S regular contributors—and one of its most popular.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Wonders of the World

FORMERLY one of the main attractions of the Chicago World's Fair, the imposing Adler Planetarium is now a permanent edifice, the only planetarium in America. Constructed with huge cut blocks of rainbow granite, its twelve sides are decorated with sculptured signs of the Zodiac.

A huge dome, seventy feet in diameter, representing the heavens, occupies the center of the building. There the stars, the great Milky Way, the planets, and the nebulæ are so perfectly reproduced that one gains the illusion of gazing into the infinite spaces of the starlit sky. The cycles of centuries can be reproduced in a few minutes, and various aspects of the sky from different parts of the earth can be shown on request.

Encircling the central hall of the planetarium, a wide corridor contains a museum, historical instruments and documents, telescopes, and all the paraphernalia necessary to carry on astronomical research and explain it to the layman.

The ADLER PLANETARIUM, Chicago

"Where the firmament passes in review"

VIEW FROM THE WEST SHOWING THE MAIN ENTRANCE

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It was murder, not battle

The Dew of Heaven

By GEORGE CHALLIS

Author of "The Bait and the Trap," "Claws of the Tigress," etc.

Blood ran as freely as gold on the Spanish Main in the days of Tranquillo the pirate

CHAPTER I.

BUCCANEERS ABOARD.

THE setting moon dipped its chin in gold and puffed its cheeks. It was not the golden stain on the moon but the green along the horizon that told Ivor Kildare the sun was about to rise over the Caribbean Sea. The wind was almost dead and the boat felt no waves at all, though the eye could see bright and dark lines running over the water.

Kildare, looking aft into the south-

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west, studied the triangular sail which had been looming there for some time; and now, as the light of dawn girdled the sea more brightly, he could make out the topsails of a large ship.

Her lofty masts still could catch a breeze, but the low triangle of canvas on the smaller boat behind could reach little higher than Kildare's own small craft. That meant oars.

And every ship, great or small, meant danger. It might be that Henry Morgan had sent out a swift periagua loaded with picked men to try to overhaul the fugitives, and perhaps the tall ship behind was another craft loaded with buccaneers, still drunk after the sacking of the city.

He turned to the Indian who stood by the mast, erect, silent, watching the same sail which troubled Kildare. The moonlight gilded his naked body from

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hips to head and repainted the shadows to make his strength seem greater. Kildare looked down at his left hand, bandaged but still frightfully hurt by the sword blade which he had grasped in the naked fingers not many days before.

His own broken sword, no longer than a dagger blade now, remained driven into the bow of the periagua, where the hilt of it stood up against the lighted sea to make a dark little cross.

"Luck, or bad luck, Luis," said Kildare to the tall Mosquito Indian who had followed him with such a perfect devotion through so many dangers.

"My heart tells me nothing, father," said the Indian; and Kildare went on forward. He leaned over the girl who lay fast asleep. As he bent lower, in her sleep she smiled. Her hair in the morning light made a pool of brightness about her face; and a curious pain ran through the heart of Kildare.

She had wakened, but without moving hand or head she kept on smiling while her eyes drifted over his face.

"Is there trouble?" she asked.

"There is a sail behind us, and every sail means trouble."

She stood up. As she peered over the sea through the dazzle of the sunrise, her hands were busy arranging her hair, and all he could watch was the slender fingers and the movements of the wrists. He felt like a low-born thief that has stolen the emperor's favorite hawk, or has slipped away with the noblest horse in a king's wide pastures. She, like a poor, mute, senseless thing, accepted him as though he were himself the king.

"They are gaining on us, Ivor," she said. "But why should every sail be an enemy?"

"It is likely that the sail either comes from Captain Morgan's fleet or that it is a Spaniard. Henry Morgan will hang me because he knows that I am Ivor Kildare. The Spaniards will hang me because they still thing that I am Captain Tranquillo."

INSTEAD of answering him directly, she said thoughtfully:

"He was a very famous pirate, that Tranquillo."

"He is a very dead pirate now," replied Kildare.

"If they are Spaniards," she said, "they will listen to me because my name is Heredia, and because the uncle of Inez Heredia is that rich and famous Larretta. Why, Ivor, they would be more likely to cherish you for the sake of the greater reward they will get if they turn me over to my uncle. Besides, they might not recognize you as the man who was captured and taken to Porto Bello."

"You have a reasonable way of speaking," said Kildare. "Do you believe all this in your heart?"

She took a breath and shook her head a little, as people do when they wish to get tears from their eyes. The sun came up that moment and drowned the world with brilliance. It seemed to Kildare that every eye within a hundred miles must see her, she was so beautiful. She interlaced her fingers. Her lips stirred a little.

"Prayers won't turn Spaniards into Englishmen," he told her. "Better pray for a wind, Inez; or shall I whistle for one?"

She had to draw her thoughts away from her prayers and from the sight of that triangular sail behind them, which was now turning from blue to white. "Do I love you because you are so brave, or because you are such a

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wild-headed hawk?" she asked, smiling at him.

"You love me for a cheaper reason than that."

"What is the reason, then?"

"Because I am yours. Inez, Inez, please don't cry. This may be our last hour on earth together. Don't spoil it with tears."

"I won't," she answered. "You ought to know, being so wise, that when a woman's eyes are wet she is often farthest from weeping."

He took her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"That is the last. That is our farewell," he told her.

"Look, Ivor! There comes the wind, darkening the sea!"

"Only a puff," he answered. "And see that fellow walk up behind us with his sweeps. That's a true periagua made all of one cedar tree—and twenty men, at least, manning it."

The big oars flashed. They could make out the craft clearly now, and see its sharpness at either end. It had the grace of an Indian's workmanship, but already they could see that white men were at the oars, and standing in the stern was a fellow whose hair darkened and brightened in the wind like metal gold.

"Aye," said Kildare. "Morgan's men!"

"God will not give us back to that beast, Ivor!"

"Those are buccaneers; and the buccaneers have gathered from the whole Caribbean to follow Henry Mogan."

"How can you tell that they are buccaneers?"

"Do you see those fellows in the bows with the long muskets? That is the buccaneer way, and even at this distance every one of them could shoot his man through the head. See the dark of their bodies, too. They've made free with sun that would have killed most Europeans. But I tell them by those wide hats and the peaked crowns. If you want more—see that winking of light at the masthead. That's a machete tied there for a flag!"

A NEGRO voice rose in a husky wail that broke and fell and rose again.

"Aye, buccaneers," said Kildare. "Every man of the lot has been drunk many a time in Tortuga, I'll swear; and they've killed cattle and buccaned the meat in the woods of Hispaniola. They have to have a slave sing for them or they won't enjoy rowing even if there's a treasure at the other end of the cruise."

"Ivor, there is something that can be done!"

"We can open the sky and climb up on a ladder of sunbeams. There's no other way. In the meantime, a little fighting. Inez, lie flat in the bottom of the boat—there by the mast!"

He picked up a pair of the muskets which were in the stern and, dropping to his knees, held the guns in view at the length of his arms. Luis, the Indian, already was aiming a gun.

"Holla! Holla!" he called.

"Holla!" came the hail from the periagua. "Tranquillo! Ho, Captain Tranquillo! We are coming on board you!"

Kildare watched the steady springing of the crystal wave at the bow of the periagua. He saw the sun-blackened faces of the rowers who, still at their work, turned and regarded him over their naked, powerful shoulders. He was aware, not for the first time in his life, of his own slenderness; a cat among fighting dogs.

"Come, my friends, and welcome!"

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called Kildare. "I have guns here and they are ready for you."

The tall man with the blowing golden hair took off his hat and raised it high above his head. Such a figure never had been seen before, surely, in such company. He wore a dove-colored blouse buttoned with gold, a lace collar, and more lace falling gracefully over his wrists, an absurd little blue jacket came hardly halfway to his belt.

"Madame, and Captain Tranquillo," he called. "We are in fact your friends—but—backwater and keep your distance, lads."

The sea gurgled from blue to green around the big sweeps as they were thrust at a sharp angle down into the water. The periagua lost its way almost at once. One of the men in the bows spat tobacco juice over the side and growled, "Slap him in the face with a quid of lead and he'll listen with his mind open, Louis."

"It is Louis d'Or!" whispered the girl. She had not stretched herself in the bottom of the boat as he suggested. She was just behind him, standing as straight as any man.

Some men said that Captain Louis d'Or was a renegade noble from the court of Louis XIV. His reputation, however, was as red as that of Henry Morgan or any other throat-cutter of them all. The beauty of his face, the elegance of his clothes and manner, simply made him more horrible to the mind. His buccaneers had trailed their oars and picked up enough guns to blow the little craft of Kildare out of the water; but Louis d'Or remained in the stern of the boat, quite unafraid.

HE called out, "You see, Tranquillo, that we must board you. Are you going to die fighting, like a fool, or live a while like a wise man?"

"There is the lady," said Kildare.

"Ah, damn the lady, and damn the talking, too!" bawled a great voice. "Close with him, Louis!"

"If that's the bargain, Tranquillo, I make it gladly," said the Frenchman. "After all, she's not rum that can be poured into twenty cups."

"You have a cross-hilted dagger in your belt," said Kildare. "Swear on it."

"To hell with this fol-de-rol!" yelled a buccaneer. "Let's take the boat." He stood up above the side of the periagua with a machete in his left hand and a pistol in his right. But a companion caught him by the long hair and pulled back his head.

"If we can buy him for a word or two, why should we pay three or four lives? That is Tranquillo, blockhead!"

"A lucky thought of yours," said Louis d'Or, in the meantime. He drew out the dagger. A red stone gleamed like fire in the heel of the pommel. "I swear never to touch the lady; never to allow another man to touch her, Tranquillo—except with permission."

He laughed as he ended his oath and jammed the dagger home in its sheath. "Close in. Lay her alongside; give way on the right. That's enough. I'll board her alone, because something may be broken in a rush!"

The periagua slid alongside and touched the small boat with a singular delicacy. Captain Louis d'Or stepped on board and at once jerked up the tarpaulin on which the girl had been sleeping in the bows. Turning, he scanned the nakedness of the hull.

"It's not in sight," said Louis. "You can tell me where it is, Tranquillo. What have you done with the treasure of the Santa Cruce?"

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"I never heard of it," said Kildare.

"You never heard of the great galleon that other Tranquillo captured?"

"Never."

"You knew nothing of the way he gave the gold and silver she carried to his men and only kept for himself a double handful of emeralds and rubies and diamonds?"

"I knew nothing of that."

"You thought he was almost a poor man?"

"Yes."

"Tranquillo the Second, or whoever you are, in the name of God why do you expect me to believe that?"

"The truth ought to be seen, Louis d'Or."

"And you trailed Tranquillo across the Caribbean just for the pleasure of stabbing him when you found him?"

"No, I was the man who ran, and he was the man who followed."

"Ah?" said Louis d'Or. "Swarm aboard, lads. Tie Tranquillo like a goat for the market. Pitch him and the girl into the periagua—and then help me search this boat."

The twenty or more buccaneers had been waiting with glistening eyes, pulling at their mustaches, held perfectly silent by their interest. Now they rose in a brown wave and washed on board the smaller boat.

CHAPTER II.

WHITE MAGIC.

THEY tied Kildare not with cruel force but securely, like men who knew their business, and then followed orders precisely by throwing him headlong into the stern of the long craft.

He turned his head, in midair, to keep from cracking his skull against a crosspiece, made his body limp, and landed without the least injury. The girl came swiftly, without a cry, and leaned over him. The Indian, writhing against the ropes that held him, could do nothing.

"Nothing," said Kildare. "They didn't even bruise the ninth of my lives."

Several of the buccaneers had remained, uninstructed, in the periagua. One of them stood over the prisoner and the girl, and spoke in the garbled Spanish which served all the Finns and Germans and English and French and Italians and Russians who buccaned meat in Hispaniola and who called themselves — because she was the strong nation on the sea—English. In this tongue he said, "I thought you were a man and a captain, Tranquillo. But you're no bigger than a child. There's no room inside your ribs for a heart. Girl, don't touch his ropes!"

He lifted the weight of his hand, but when she took her touch from the arm of Kildare and watched the big fellow, quietly, he let his hand fall again.

The human tide came pouring back into the periagua.

"Pick up Tranquillo," commanded Louis d'Or.

The big man who guarded the prisoner obeyed by gripping Kildare by the hair of his head and jerking him to his feet. And then with a start of savage pleasure the brute stared; but no sound had come from Kildare.

Tall Louis d'Or, walking aft, confronted Kildare with, "What did you do with it?"

"That treasure you talk about? I've never touched it."

"You said more than that. You never had heard of it, either."

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Kildare watched the sneer in the face of the Frenchman.

"I never heard of it."

"That's the lie of a fool," said Louis d'Or. "Look here!"

He pointed to the side of the periagua. Over a squared bit of surface the cedar had been trimmed flat and rubbed smooth, and into the wood had been cut a number of little rude pictures such as a sailor knows how to make with his knife—a church with a spindling cross above it, a gallows, three conventional trees for a forest, a long rapier, a sloop under sail, and the most ambitious design of all: a forested mountain with the sun rising over its head. But the carving of hands seemed to be the chief pleasure of the artist. A dozen or more of them were clearly drawn. Between the scattered figures, words which had no connection with one another were worked into the wood with the edge of the knife. On the whole it was rather delicate work.

"This was the favorite boat of Captain Tranquillo the First," said Louis d'Or. "But you know that as well as I know it. And when he sat here at the tiller he filled up some of the hot hours at sea whittling away at this damned, silly cipher. It's a message. About what? About his treasure—which you trailed till you found Tranquillo the Second. Except that he had treasure to write about, why would he have put this work into a bit of wood no bigger than my two hands?"

"He may have had enough jewels to break the back of a Spanish mule," said Kildare. "But about that I know nothing. I give you my word—"

"You will give me plenty of words before I'm done with you. Fetch him to the mast, my lads!" said Louis d'Or. "No, wait for a moment. Read off what's written here, and that may buy you a chance for a little more quiet, Tranquillo."

"I can read the words," said Kildare, "but I can't put a meaning into them unless I have a chance to study them."

"Study 'em at the masthead!" said one of the crew.

They dragged Kildare forward. He gave one look to the girl and saw that she had sunk to the bottom of the periagua and stared hopelessly down.

"Rig a tackle at the masthead," commanded Louis d'Or. "Briskly, now."

ONE of the buccaneers ran up the mast like a monkey with a tarry rope end gripped in his teeth. In a moment he was down again with the rope passed through the block above.

"Free his legs so he can dance," said Louis d'Or. "Tie his hands behind his back and fasten the line to them.—Now, Tranquillo, you see how you stand. The line's taut. A word from me and up you go into the air. You know what will happen then. Your muscles and tendons will hold for a while, but in a bit they'll give way. Your shoulders will break from in back. You'll never lift hand again while you live."

"I know those things," said Kildare.

He looked up, not in hope but because it was necessary to take a deep breath.

"So I ask you again," said Louis d'Or. "What do you know of the treasure of Tranquillo?"

"I've been through the hands of Henry Morgan," said Kildare. "Isn't that the sieve to catch big jewels or small ones? If I'd carried anything away, it would be in the small boat, there, and you've found nothing. Or if

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I knew anything, Louis d'Or, what a fool I would be to pay with my life—aye, or with the use of my arms—for the sake of keeping a few handfuls of treasure!"

"You talk well enough, but you talk about the wrong things," said Louis d'Or. "Up with him, lads!"

The Indian made a vain effort to break from his ropes and help Kildare.

Louis d'Or had stepped back and was raising his hand when such a cry came from Inez Heredia that even through the sweating flesh of those half-naked brutes ran a shudder. She was calling out: "I am finding it! I am finding the key to the cipher."

"She's only talking to waste our time," said one buccaneer. "How could a woman do in a minute what twenty men haven't done in twenty days? Shall we hoist away, Louis? Let's hear this Tranquillo screech a bit!"

"There is plenty of time for everything," said Louis d'Or. "Hold him here."

He went aft and sat on a crosspiece while the girl crouched and pointed out her discovery, only saying first, "If I can show you something in this, Louis d'Or, is it worth anything to Ivor Kildare?"

"Is that his name?" asked the Frenchman.

"It is. And if he had had the treasure, would he have carried me away in an empty boat? Louis d'Or—"

"Talk about the cipher of these carvings," said the Frenchman. "And if you can tell us enough, I'll see that your Kildare-Tranquillo, or whatever he is, lives until we touch the shore."

She looked desperately up at Louis d'Or, and then brushed a hand across her eyes as though she were casting from her the sudden panic of hope.

She pointed again to the inscription on the wood.

And with bent backs, out of which the muscles stood like arms and big fingers—for every man except the fine captain was naked to the waist—the buccaneers stared and listened. Only three had remained at the mast with the prisoner.

"I've heard it said that wherever there's a puzzle like this, the only way to solve it is to notice repetitions," said the girl. "If letters are spelled here, we ought to be able to make out some of them by the repetitions. But there aren't many repetitions except in the hands. Do you see? There are many hands; some of them have one finger extending, and some have two, or three, or four, or five."

"For the five vowels!" exclaimed Louis d'Or. "But still there's no sense to be made out of it. What words are meant by the mountain, the ship, the skull and crossbones?"

"I don't know. It may all be a hard thing to work out. And half of it may be used to confuse the reader. But you notice that every word begins with a capital? Suppose we use only the capitals, and the hands are the vowels—do you see?"

"There's something in that," said Louis d'Or. "What else?"

"I don't know. I'm trying to see, and in a little more time—for the sake of the kind God, Monsieur Louis d'Or!—"

"For the sake of our hides!" shouted a voice. "D'you see what's blown up into the sky right over us?"

THEY looked as the long brown arm pointed. It seemed to Kildare that the thing was a bit of magic—and white magic it seemed in his eyes. For that ship which had been

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a blue ghost in the distance, at dawn, had grown upon the buccaneers during all of the time they searched the small boat and then examined the mind of their prisoner and listened to the explanations of the girl.

A huge galleon, it had lifted its courses above the sea, and then all its hull. The wind over its starboard quarter, leaning with the good breeze, and every sail bagful of air, it came rushing with its white bow waves running out on either side. It was near enough for the men to be marked aloft, and for the eye to follow the glimmering rounds of the muzzles of the cannon. Those rounded bows, that hull towering up fore and aft, to Kildare was swelled and loaded with a great cargo of hope.

"Up sail! Get out the sweeps!" shouted Louis d'Or. "My God, have I shipped with a crew of blind men? It's the Inquisition running at you, fools! Jump to it!"

For the great banner that shone billowing from its staff at the poop of the galleon was the flag of Spain. And Spanish justice for buccaneers was as neat as the way of a cat with a mouse: not a sudden death, but a very sure one.

Kildare, jerked out of the way, was thrust aside; there was a creaking of ropes, a rattling of the heavy handles of the sweeps against the tholes. And then he heard the voice of Louis d'Or again:

"Get the girl into the small boat and cast it off. She's enough to stop them for a minute."

It was done.

"Let him come with me!" she cried. "Captain Louis d'Or—"

The long oars ruthlessly pushed the little boat away, heeling it over with their pressure. Then the wind put its heavy shoulder into the sail of the periagua, the sweeps gave it headway, they began to run, gathering speed in impulses like the conscious efforts of a good horse, while the small boat fell astern, paying off till its broadside was turned to the wind.

Inez stood at the prow, waving, smiling. She would not have him remember her with a weeping face.

Above the shouting of the buccaneers he could hear her calling his name, a music that grew smaller than a ghost on the wind. Her features blurred. Still he could see the flash of her waving hand and then the brightness of her hair turning dim until at last she was a shadow.

He had not spoken. He could not have uttered a word. The taste of death had been in his mouth a little before, and now sorrow was more bitter than salt in his throat.

CHAPTER III.

A CLOSE CALL.

THE Spaniard had grown still higher in the sky, but now he backed his mainsail suddenly. He would, after all, pause a moment to pick up Inez Heredia from the boat. A shout of joy came ringing from the throats of the buccaneers. They were standing with mighty effort as they gave their weight to the big sweeps.

"Set Tranquillo's hands free. Let him come aft!" called Louis d'Or.

So Kildare found himself at the side of the Frenchman, who, like a good sailor, was watching the leech of his sail, not the looming enemy behind.

"If they take us, they take you with us, and all the squalling of the girl will never keep your neck out of a noose. We only have to name you

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Tranquillo. Then the hanging they failed to give you at Porto Bello they'll furnish you with now."

"That's all as true as a book," agreed Kildare.

"Then lend me your brains," said Louis d'Or. "If you can think of anything that will put more wind in the sail or grease the bottom of this boat for us, let me know. Because the wind is growing, Tranquillo, and that Spanish tub with all her tophamper is bound to blow up to us before long."

Kildare was looking aft. He said, still staring astern:

"They're picking up the boat now. But they've already lost nearly all their way.

"Take a slant into the wind as close as you can bring her and let every man spring on the oars. And when you're in the eye of the wind, crossing the bows of the galleon, down sail and with your sweeps carry straight on against the wind as straight a line as you can rule. The galleon can only follow by tacking—and you have a chance in three of beating her. These fellows of yours have muscles enough to use them for a long while."

"If I cross her bows, as you say," pondered Louis d'Or, "we'll come within good cannon shot."

"Aye, and of course. But Spaniards are not good at the big guns, and the small ones won't reach you."

"If a single shot caroms on the water and cracks the periagua, we're gone."

"True," said Kildare, and was silent, watching.

The darkness suddenly left the face of Louis d'Or. He shouted:

"Do you hear? You're sea-dogs now, but if the Dons catch you, you'll be dog-meat. And in this wind they'll overhaul us if we run before the breeze. We're going to cross her bows and row into the wind. That brings us under her guns. A single shot will lame us to a walk. Is there a voice against it?"

A good, deep roar came from every throat:

"Into the wind, Captain Louis! Into the wind, Louis d'Or, and chance the damned guns!"

So they turned, slowly, on account of the length of the narrow boat. Edging well into the wind, the leech of the sail began to tremble; and Kildare, as he sprang to an oar, saw the mainsail of the galleon filled again. She towered like a white mountain in the sky, and by the size of her bow wave she had almost gathered full way again.

"Now down sail, down with the mast also!" called Kildare.

"D'ye hear?" thundered Louis d'Or. "Down sail and mast! Jump to it, lads!"

They sprang to it for their lives.

By the look of them, one could tell that Louis d'Or was one who could pick and choose when he selected a crew in Tortuga or Jamaica. There was not a small man in the lot; there was not a soul of them without the brawn of a bull. A few of them ran down the sail and took down and stowed the mast, while the other kept on straining at the oars.

But there was a grim loss of way, all this while; and as the freshening wind met the periagua, lean and long as it was, it seemed to blow the boat to a stop. Anxiously, Kildare measured the diminished distance.

THE Spaniard, coming up on a good slant, and sailing far closer to the wind than his blunt bows would have led a sailor to expect, was

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bowling along closer and closer. He had come to such a near distance that the uproar of cheering on the crowded decks became like the rushing of a storm wind. And even single voices could be picked out of the tumult.

A white flag of mist appeared at his bows, blew away. There was a sound overhead like the tearing of strong canvas; and then the sea leaped up in a bright flash far beyond the side of the periagua.

A groan came out of the buccaneers, then, as though the cannon ball had struck their life with a heavy wound. Even Kildare, who knew guns with a rare experience, was surprised by the range of that cannon, for the Spaniards as a rule favored many small guns, the English a few great ones. However, this looked like an exception that would ruin the men of Louis d'Or.

He, however, stood up with a fine courage in the stern, steering right into the eye of the wind and shouting encouragement.

"A little way uphill, and then all the rest of the way down. Pull till your backs crack. Lay out straight and stretch yourselves. Well done, Olaf! Hai, Peters, bend your oar, but don't break it!—Aha, my wild bulls, now that you charge all together, let's see what happens!"

Four flags of the deadly white blew now at the bows of the Spaniard; the quadruple roar of the bullets overhead joined with the brief, chattering thunder of the reports, and every man ducked his head saving Ivor Kildare and Louis d'Or.

Three balls plumped into the sea beyond the periagua. One landed so close to the stern that the wave it threw tipped the frail boat a little. It was very excellent shooting.

"There is some damned renegade English dog on board the Spaniard. Or a French dog who's thrown his soul away into the Spanish hands. No Spaniard ever shot so near a mark. Give way, my lads!" shouted Louis d'Or. "Now, Tranquillo! What do you say to my jolly fellows?"

"If you couldn't conquer a kingdom with 'em, you could rob the king, at least," answered Kildare.

And there was breath enough left in two or three throats to laugh a little.

The only black man of the lot, a creature who looked like an ape, with a forward thrusting head on a vast neck that was overgrown with hair almost to the shoulders, now pitched his head to the side and burst into a rousing song, with a wail and a yell to it that maintained a strong rhythm. Kildare could not understand the obscurely pronounced words, but he saw that a new life came into the crew. They bent to their oars with a longer sweep.

They jumped to that rhythm until the periagua leaped more and more quickly ahead.

And now they had come, certainly, to the critical moment. Those great bow guns of the galleon must be close to perfect range, and the periagua, if it remained unscathed for a few more minutes, was certain to draw away to safety.

Once more the smoke puffed from the bows. Something rushed like a viewless devil past the ear of Kildare. A wind pulled like invisible hands at his flesh. And right alongside a shot plumped into the water and hurled a column of sea into the air and on board them, blown by the wind. Two other shots had fallen short as Louis d'Or shouted:

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"Overboard with him! The best part of him is left, but we can't use it!"

Kildare turned and saw a headless body lifted and flung into the water.

IT did not sink at once, but lay in the midst of a spreading stain of red. Then a curving spin rose above the surface, furrowed the water.

He could see the long, pale belly of the shark—and the dead body disappeared.

Even Louis d'Or was silenced by a thought for a moment after this. From the Spanish ship a great voice of disappointment came howling across the water as though pouring from a single throat.

Immediately another four-gun volley was fired, but all of these shots fell well astern.

It was plain then that the Spaniard, in his eagerness, had made a great mistake in sailing. He had brought his ship too near to the wind, and now the fore-topsail was taken aback, spatting the mast with a noise as loud as a handclap close to the ears. The galleon shuddered visible and then paid off. It was a vital distance that had been lost.

"Easier now, my lads!" called Louis d'Or. "Easier, easier! We've sailed through the mouth of the tiger and only been scratched by one of his teeth. But if this damned wind keeps freshening we'll have the Spaniard up with us again. Steady, and a long stroke should tell the story for us."

Half the strain was taken from the heaving bodies of the oarsmen, but still the sweeps worked with what seemed hardly less power than before.

The Spaniard, if he had been put out of cannon range for the moment, was not entirely disheartened. He began tacking into the wind, sailing on courses that swept him back and forth. As a heron beats up into the sky with the strokes of his hollow wings cupping the air while the falcon swims swiftly around the horizon and so mounts, in the same manner the long boat was urged by the oars against a windy river of the sea while the ranging galleon swung back and forth and at every tack came closer to its target; for the rowers were beginning to feel exhaustion.

Their heads dropped to this side or to that and there remained. Their mouths pulled at the corners so that they seemed to be grinning. The cords of their necks thrust out. Their bodies were all in a tremble.

Louis d'Or pulled his long rapier twice half out of the scabbard as he looked at the galleon over his shoulder. Then he stared at Kildare and asked:

"Well, you had one bit of good advice in your head; have you any other?"

"Yes," said Kildare. "To rest on our oars and breathe ourselves, then run back at them and fight."

He had hardly said this when the wind blew a good, hearty gust that tipped every wave with white; then the breeze died down suddenly, the waves fell into a welter of unquietness, merely, and when they looked back they saw the sails of the galleon hanging loosely down like the cheeks of an old man.

The heads of the rowers dropped forward; slowly they oared away, and every stroke took them that exact distance from the galleon until the hull of it dropped into the sea again, and then the courses sank into the blue, and the blue itself ran up, like a dye soaked

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from the sea, until all the upper sails were stained also.

CHAPTER IV.

A CIPHER REVEALED.

THEY lay—literally—on their oars, with their heads fallen forward and tipped up and down as the waves swayed irregularly the long blades of the sweeps. They could thank the lightness of the cedar boat for letting them escape from the wind and the Spaniard by force of their muscles only.

Louis d'Or said, "Brothers of the coast!" and every head was jerked up suddenly.

"Here," said Louis d'Or, who remained standing in the stern as he had all through the crisis of the chase, looking bigger and more master of himself and the crew than ever before, "here is this Tranquillo the Second, who chased the first Tranquillo and killed him in a fair fight. With enough brains in his head to help us away from the Spaniard, he is still among us. But the treasure of Tranquillo is not with us. Now, brothers, give me your voices. What shall we do with him?"

The shortest man of the crew was the one who answered first. He was an Irishman, the shortest of all the buccaneers, but much the broadest. He had blue eyes and a skin that never would be sun-blackened but burned into freckles that looked like dark blisters. The tip of his nose turned up and was cooked constantly red and raw by the sun. He spent a good deal of his time touching the raw tip with a tentative forefinger, and then looking at his finger to see if it had brought any of the singed skin away.

His name was Padraic, so he was called Pat. He spoke up in a voice curiously high and whining, like a dog in a cold night whining outside the door of a house:

"I would like to see Tranquillo's sword, first of all. We can talk after we've seen his sword."

"Why do you want to see his sword?" asked Louis d'Or.

"Well," said Pat, "I knew a Portuguese that had been in Kingston, and the Portuguese knew a Finn that had sailed with Tranquillo the First and Tranquillo the Second. He said that this English-Italian had a sword no bigger than a needle, but he had a way with it of making a dazzle in the eyes of a man, and then stabbing him through the brain or heart.

"You would have said that a wasp had stung the man, or a hornet. Three drops of blood, and the man was dead. He said—the Finn did—that a good ax, or a machete, or a broadsword with an armored man swinging it, or even a rapier in the hands of a dancing, prancing fencing man like Louis d'Or was no damned good against that needle in the hands of Tranquillo the Second. That's why I want to see the sword."

Louis d'Or looked curiously at Kildare.

"Draw your sword," he said.

Kildare drew it out of the sheath and made a fencer's salute to the three points of the compass. Then he held the sword straight up before him. It was a mere shred, a spindling shard of steel. It was hard to imagine it drawn out to its proper length, and terminating with a needle-like point.

"I'd as soon fight with a moonbeam in my fist!" said the Irishman, staring. "Man, how did you come to fight by such a bit of a thing as that even before it was broken short?"

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Kildare said, "I was once in a fight, my arm aching from the weight of a rapier, and a strong parry shivered the rapier, and left not very much more than half its length and a mere splinter of the steel. But just when I told myself that I was to die, I found that the weight was gone from my arm, my feet were light—and though the sword was gone, there was always the point, the point, the point!"

He raised his voice, laughed, and shot the little blade back into its meager scabbard.

"Now in a good, hard fight," said the Irishman, "when you stand close, and it's sweating and straining, and no room to dance—like a fight on shipboard, we'll say—you mean that that little thing, that needle, is anything against the good whanging weight of a machete that had been ground sharp?"

"Well, my friend," said Kildare, "did you ever fight with a wasp that is always ready to sting?"

THERE had been some murmuring up and down the long periagua during this talk. Now the talk all died away. They remembered that ray of bright steel in the hand of Kildare, and wondered. Perhaps the sting of that wasp would mean the death.

"Talkin' in this way," said the Irishman, "I say, give Tranquillo the riddle to read. If he reads it by dark, let him be one of us. If he can't read it, let him do more good to the belly of a shark than he's doing to any of us!"

The thought seemed good to the rest. With one shout they agreed.

That was how the thing was set. Kildare sat down by the puzzle and pondered over it.

He began where the girl had left off and took her suggestions as though they were inspired. For he had a respect for mind. He himself, without any weight of hand or bigness of body, had managed to hold his own among fighting men. Quick hands and feet had done part of it. Quick wits had done far more.

A man can never be swifter than his brain. And the girl might have done what the gravest man in the world with a library of books would never accomplish.

Kildare, through the heat of the middle day neither ate or drank. He felt neither thirst nor hunger, for his mind drifted strangely between the thought of Inez Heredia and the sense that his own life might end when the sun went down.

He kept going back to the beginning, on her presumption. If the hands were vowels, how would one begin, supposing that only the first letters of the words counted?

"Saqsf—" "Seqsf—" "Soqsf—" It made no difference what vowel he put in the place of the hand, using the first letters of the words, he arrived at no sense.

"Now," said a voice finally, after an age of time, "the sun is getting into the west, Tranquillo." That was Louis d'Or speaking.

There were so many "t's" in the last words that they stuck in the mind of Kildare. Instead of the "S" of "Safe," he read "T."

T-a-q-s-f that made no sense, either.

But it seemed nearer to something.

Then it came to him that the first letters, the consonants, might not represent their own positions in the alphabet. The letter before "S" was "R." So, substituting in the case of each initial consonant the letter that went before it, he came to "R-A-P-R," which was an unlikely beginning, even if he

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used any other vowel in the place of the "A."

Instead of taking the letter before, he would try the vowel after.

This made: "T-A-R-T-"

THE brain and heart of Kildare leaped. That westering sun was already golden in the west. Soon it would be red, and then it would drop like a stone and leave the world to the quick rush of the tropic darkness, like a flight of black wings. He had to hurry. But this was like the beginning of a word. "Tart—" Then came another hand. Call it "A" again. "T-A-R-T-A-G-A-"

As he spelled out the word, "Tartaga," it seemed to him perfect nonsense, and then into his mind jumped a very similar sound: "Tortuga," that island whose humped back looked like a great turtle. Tortuga—that must be right, and he had reached suddenly to the key of the riddle! But there must be more to come. A hand with four fingers means "O," with five fingers, "U," with one finger, "A." Why then, since the vowels were ordered a, e, i, o, u, the fingers were apportioned in number to the place of the vowel in the alphabet.

This was light indeed. Of the sign of the sailing ship he could make nothing. He disregarded it and rushed on to the initial letters and the hands again. So he spelled out at once: "t-h-r-e-e."

He jumped the compass sign and hurried on still farther. The next made "S-t-e-p-s—"

He could have shouted aloud.

"Tortuga—three—steps—" t h i s was sense and there were words, no matter how obscure their meaning.

He went on, always disregarding designs, no matter how complicated.

And the message that he deciphered now read: "Tortuga—three—steps—from—the—black—rock—to — Dutch —John."

The signs, therefore, were nothing. Nothing but terminals to signify the end of a word and betray the searcher into a vain inquiry into some pictorial meaning.

On Tortuga there was something three steps away from the black rock towards the step of Dutch John. That was the meaning.

What was the thing? Why, it was merely the place where that great treasure of jewels was located, of course!

The sun slid down like a man ducking his head beneath a bank.

"I have it," said Kildare, looking up.

There was an ache in the back of his neck, and he rubbed himself there.

It seemed to him that the eyes of Louis d'Or were green with light, like emeralds.

"What have you?" asked the captain.

"Is there one of you that knows Dutch John?" asked Kildare.

"Dutch John that died of the fever on Tortuga?" asked one of the men. "I never knew him. But I've been drunk with him a few times."

"Do you know where he was buried? Near black rocks?"

"I don't know a thing about rocks, but I helped dig the grave where we laid him. It was a queer thing that he was so fat his body begun to stink less than a day after he died."

"There is a black rock near his grave," said Kildare. "This is what the writing of Tranquillo says: 'Tortuga, three steps from the black rock to Dutch John.' And that's where we'll find the treasure buried."

They were tired men, but they began

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a great yelling. The sun dipped down, suddenly, and the darkness ran without a star over the sea.

Three days later they had beached the periagua on a white lee shore when at the suggestion of Louis d' Or, the blacksmith's anvil was set up and he was put to work forging a new blade for the sword of Kildare; and since he used a bit of fine Toledo steel and was a high master in the art of tempering subtle, strong steel, his work was a masterpiece.

CHAPTER V.

SUDDEN MUTINY.

THEY reached Tortuga, humped out of the water like the back of a turtle. Closer in, they entered the narrow waters between that little island and Hispaniola, and here the periagua was run into a cove and beached. Louis was left to guard the boat. It was still half a mile down the beach to the reported grave of Dutch John, and the men marched rapidly. The water rolled and creamed on their right. On the left rose the big, dark cedars and a crowded growth of clammy cherry, dogwood, fustic, lignum-vitæ, logwood, gru-gru palms, and always masses of ferns at every interval.

"Why should Dutch John be buried so far from the anchorage?" demanded Louis d'Or.

"Because," said a buccaneer, "the fever he had was the catching kind. We threw dice to see what men would go bury him at a distance, and I was one of the unlucky ones. However, the fever never came out on me.—There," he added, "is the place—somewhere in there. Aye, and here it is!"

He ran forward suddenly and stopped at a point where half a dozen heavy stones were piled one above the other to make a squat little pyramid. "This is the place!" he declared, still pointing down.

And all about him the buccaneers halted, breathless, staring about them for a sign of the black rock which now meant so much. A cloud of mosquitoes poured like a lazy smoke out of the woods and began to settle for blood but not a hand rose to brush them away.

Then the Irishman ran and beat aside a tall growth of ferns, trampling them down. Behind them, glistening with the jungle sweat like the head of a living beast, appeared a black rock that jutted two feet or more above the ground. A low, groaning sound of relief came from the men.

Pat, turning, made three long strides from the rock towards the gravestones of Dutch John. He halted, stamping his feet into the ground.

"Here!" he said. "This would be the place!"

They began to dig, some with their hands, and some with a pair of adzes which made very good hoes, though the carpenter cursed when he saw the delicate edge of the steel being brought down on rocks.

All in a moment a hole was yawning. Suddenly a hand lifted something between thumb and forefinger. It shone in the sun with a yellow glitter.

"Gold! Gold!" shouted the discoverer. "The treasure is here! We have found it!"

"It is here, sure enough!" said a tall German called Johann. "Then, rally to me, my mates!—Keep the captain's third for ourselves! Down with that damned whip-using, murdering Louis d'Or! At them, masters!"

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The crowd formed into two quick swirls, Louis d'Or and a narrow cluster of men in the center, with the negro, the Irishman, and three others, and about them more than twice that number. Some thirteen or fourteen to six made up the tale of the odds. Most were armed with machetes, in the play of which they were almost as scientific as any gentleman dancing with his rapier. The German, Johann, carried an axe on the end of a long handle. One fellow was content with his adze.

There was an instant death. One of the mutineers struck his heavy machete down through the left shoulder of the negro as deep as the lungs. The black man should have fallen in an agony. Instead, he fought as a tiger fights, even after a bullet has touched its heart. The other, trying to jerk his weapon free from the flesh, pulled the negro towards him. The black stumbled to his knees, coughing blood.

The machete was knocked out of his hand by the fall, but he pulled a long, curved knife out of his belt and stabbed upwards into the belly of his murderer. Still on his knees, he struck right and left.

A second mutineer went down; a third was deeply wounded in the leg.

The fight was now regular. There were no firearms. They had been left in the boat by the command of the captain. Therefore the battle was hand to hand; Louis d'Or with his long rapier standing like a tower in the war, and four others working in a circle around his back. A dozen mutineers were striving to break through that living guard.

AS for Kildare, the beach was open and his way was clear. If he had been half a prisoner even after solving the riddle of Tranquillo's message, he was now able to seize on his freedom at once.

In fact, he turned and made a step or two. But the moment that his back was turned, it seemed to him that the clash of the steel and the howling of the fighters redoubled; it blew like a trumpet in his ears, and in a moment he had whirled and drawn that slender sword of his, shouting: "Louis d'Or! Louis d'Or!"

A pair of the mutineers immediately in front of him jumped about to face that attack from the rear. They struck with their machetes at the same time, full at his head. He stepped just outside the sweep of the weapons, as a feather is knocked back by the wind of a handstroke. For a subtle instant their hands were down and in that instant he had sprung in. His sword flashed. He was out again. The point of his blade no longer was brilliant as a ray of sunlight. Some small drops ran from it and one of the mutineers dropped his machete, grasped his throat with both hands, and began to gasp and choke.

"Hai, Juan—are you down?" cried his companion. And then: "Here's for you, Tranquillo!—I'll make you tranquil!—I'll give you a long sleep!—Brother Juan, watch me pay your score before you die."

He was letting drive a maze of strokes at Kildare as he shouted, charging in wildly, for the fallen man was his sworn companion after that habit of the buccaneers of choosing a brother who would guard a man's back in a time of danger.

Kildare danced back two steps. The delicate blade of his rapier engaged the furious machete with a touch soft as silk, but which nevertheless turned the mighty strikes awry. Then the sword darted in and out. The eye

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could hardly tell whether or not it had touched the flesh, but the buccaneer fell dead on his face.

That was how a gap was made in the circle of the assailants, as Kildare sprang in to the side of Louis d'Or. The Frenchman had been wounded by a grazing edge high on his head; the blood reddened half his face and dripped rapidly down over his finery, but he kept laughing like a happy devil as he fought.

He had lost another man; still another was mortally wounded and fought with his body leaning over, his hand clasped to his gashed side. It was murder, not battle. Eight mutineers against five of the captain's side; and one of the five a dying man. And yet there was still a chance that resided in the educated hands of Kildare and Louis d'Or.

The captain shouted: "Brave Tranquillo!—Heart of my heart! By God, I love you, and we'll die together laughing. Do you hear, Gaspar?"

"I hear," sighed the wounded man.

"You are dead anyway. Be a useful man and run in, let them kill you ten times more, but cut the throat of Johann for us."

Gaspar, without a word of response, straightened and uttered a wild yell. The blood burst in a torrent from his wounded side yet he rushed straight at Johann. The long axe struck him down, horribly hurt. He leaped up again and clove the skull of big Johann like a block of soft wood with a hatchet.

KILDARE saw that from the corner of his eye. He had watched two of the mutineers fall back a step, speak to one another, and now they bore straight in on him with a rush. He knew the meaning of that. One of them might die, but the other was almost sure to flesh his machete in the throat or the body of Kildare; and men did not survive such strokes as the brush knives were capable of giving. They were two more sworn brothers.

One of them was a mere boy of twenty, big as he was. He had fair hair so light that it blew about his head and face as he ran in, shouting. The other either was prematurely bald in front or had shaved himself to look like a Mongol, and wore his remaining hair in two dangling pigtails down his back. He bounded high in the air as he reached at Kildare; the second lad ran in low.

Fencing would not save Kildare then. He flung his narrow-bladed sword like a dart right into the body of the older buccaneer. A side-step snaked him away from the machete of the second. He caught the man by the sword wrist.

It was like laying hold of a piece of wood, grained and knotted with hard tendons. Instantly the youngster had him by the throat and jerked his machete free. It had done work before, and the bright steel of it was filmed over with a shining skin of purple. Body to body, there was no room for Kildare to work but he had pulled from his belt a poniard that matched his rapier—a dripping icicle of steel, a veritable needle. With that he stabbed the mutineer twice under the arm.

Something thudded heavily against his head. It was the machete fallen from a dead hand. The loose, heavy body poured down through the arms of Kildare and lay at his feet. He leaped over it. He of the pigtails lay on his face with a glittering span or so of the sword projecting from the cen-

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ter of his back. Kildare jerked him up by the braided hair and whipped out the weapon. The hilt was slippery with blood, but the blade was all intact.

He turned, and saw that the battle was ended.

The Irishman, covered with blood and brains, had struck the last resisting mutineer through the head and was stepping back, now, panting heavily. And tall Louis d'Or was spotted red from head to foot.

These and Kildare was only three who remained standing out of twenty-one chosen men who had been alive and well ten minutes before.

The whole place was sopping red. The stones of the beach were slippery with blood that was still welling.

Of the captain's group there were three dead; the captain himself hurt in a trifling manner in the head; the Irishman with only a shallow gash on his left arm; and Kildare untouched.

Of the mutineers in that famous and murderous battle, eight men were killed outright, three died of their wounds at once and two were deliberately butchered under the eyes of Kildare by the captain, who ran the long blade of his rapier calmly through their bodies. One of the entire fourteen remained. He was that same fellow who had been hurt in the leg by the negro, and he had received other wounds before he staggered back helplessly and fell at the foot of a tree with blood running out of him fast. But he had worn a small brandy flask at his belt and this was now in his hand.

He lifted it and called out: "To your health, my captain! Dig up the treasure and let me see the shine of the jewels of Tranquillo before I go to sleep."

The captain stalked towards the man with his red sword in his hand but Kildare caught his arm and drew him back.

"The man's dying," he said.

"I've killed two on their feet and two on the ground," said the captain, "and that would make five for my tale."

"Let him be," said Kildare.

"I give him to you—the dog!" said the captain. "Look, Tranquillo! How God favors me! He wipes out the worthless vermin with whom I should have had to share the treasure we are about to uncover, but more than that, He gives me on the same day a blood-brother worth more than a passport into heaven. Give me your hand!—Here, Pat—your hand also. Here are we three with the manifest sign of God on us and a red world under our feet. Shall we be true to one another?"

THEY stood in a closed circle with blood dripping from the slippery hands which were clenched together.

"Would I be fool enough to have another man near me, after this day's work? Captain, you've done with four of them, but two were on the ground. And this dancing man, this Tranquillo—his ugly mug looks beautiful to me with the blood on it! He killed four fighting men with the fight still in them. My eyes have seen it! Are we brothers, Tranquillo?"

"We are," said Kildare, looking deep into the eyes of the Irishman.

"And I am one!" exclaimed Louis d'Or. He recited: "My hand is your hand—"

As he paused the other two repeated the familiar oath: "My hand is your hand—"

Then all three went on together:

". . . my eye is your eye, my blood is your blood. Amen!"

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That oath had sealed many a hard-fighting pair of buccaneers to a single fortune; but it never before had linked three together.

CHAPTER VI.

PANAMA LURE.

WITH the blood still unwashed from them, they picked up the adzes and began to dig furiously at the hole which already had been opened.

The dying mutineer began to sing new words to an old tune, keeping the time with the sway of his brandy flask.

Louis d'Or, Louis d'Or,
We were twenty men and more,
Louis d'Or.
And we sailed and we sailed
Till the Dew of Heaven failed,
Louis d'Or.

Louis d'Or, Louis d'Or,
We have changed the gold for gore,
Louis d'Or.
Light the candle, ring the bell,
For we'll sing our song in hell,
Louis d'Or.

Here the adze in the hand of the Irishman rang on metal. They shouted, and instantly had out of the pebbles a box of rusted iron. A stroke with an adze sprung it open.

For a moment, so strong and fierce was the expectation, it seemed to Kildare that the box was brimmed with red and green and white lights of priceless gems. And then his brain clearing, he saw that there was only a folded piece of paper.

"This?" shouted the captain, lifting the paper. "Is this what we find? Look, Tranquillo! Look, Pat! There are eighteen men that have died for the sake of sharing—a damned rag of paper!"

He spread out the sheet, and the eyes of Kildare pondered a design far stranger than that which dead Tranquillo had carved on the side of his periagua but patently from the same brain.

The Irishman was tying up his bleeding arm and saying, philosophically, "It's only a bit of paper chase, lads. That damned ghost of Tranquillo will run us around and around the world before we're through with him."

Here the buccaneer beneath the tree burst into a great, mocking laughter that snapped short. He rolled over on his face and began to beat the pebbles with his hands and feet like a child on the floor, helpless with mirth. Then, as though a hand had touched him, he lay suddenly still.

"It has cost us," said Louis d'Or, "eighteen lives and other troubles to find—a piece of paper. Tranquillo, you've had fortune with you when you looked at the design the fool cut on the side of the periagua. Can you do anything with this?"

Kildare sat down on the beach, cross-legged, and peered at the document. The others stared over his shoulders. The blood was drying on his body, pulling at the skin as it turned hard. The mosquitoes, singing their small song through the wash of the sea waters, gathered unnoticed about the three.

"A cat, a rat, a dog, a mule, a bee, an owl, a cat again," said Kildare. "Then a bow and arrow, a coronet and a crown, a cannon, a twig of flowers, a sword scratched out, a flower again. What the devil is there to say about that?"

"Repetitions, said the girl," remarked Louis d'Or. "Repetitions are the things to look for in the solving of a cipher.—Ah, there's a brain in

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that girl, Tranquillo. I don't wonder that you preferred her with empty hands to any of the damned mincing fools that most men meet. Beauty kills brains, as a rule. But God made her face the foreword, the true title page of the whole book of her. She would be worth half the treasure if she were here to work out this riddle for us."

"She minded me," said the Irishman, Padraic, "of a girl I left behind me in the old country—except that Tranquillo's lady has bright hair and mine had black, and Tranquillo's is short and mine is tall, and Tranquillo's is slender and mine would fill a door—"

"Then how did she remind you of your girl in Ireland?" asked the captain.

"How can I tell?" exclaimed Padraic. "But all at once I thought of her. Because there's woman in them both, I suppose."

Kildare said, "Suppose you look at it in another way. There are living things, flowers, weapons, numbers. Four kinds. For what? For vowels? And why not? All the five vowels may not be used. But no, there are signs over letters, and perhaps they stand for the fourth vowel."

"What are the words that are written down?" asked Louis d'Or.

"Ma — no — me — you — rej — he — ya — wake — naya — joy," read Kildare. "That's hard to make sense of, eh?"

"Aye, but most of the things must have meanings," said the captain. "That is, if he wrote down a sentence of any length. Well, as your lady pointed out—five sorts of things would mean the five vowels, eh? Then try the consonants the way you did before, and use only the first ones."

Kildare shook his head. He could feel the struggle ahead of him increasing every moment.

"Let me think!" he begged. "I'll sit here till I've found the answer."

Dimly he could hear the captain and the Irishman conversing and agreeing that it would be a hopeless task to bury so many dead men. They could be left to birds and flies and beasts. So the two collected, calmly, the weapons and the money belts of the dead and went back with heavy arm-loads towards the boat.

Finally, after much working, the deciphered message read, "Panama behind peacocks tail San Francisco."

He stood up, stretched the numbness out of his legs, and walked past the dead men, past the gloomy cedars, to the periagua, where Louis d'Or and the Irishman had succeeded in launching the long boat on a rising tide. Over the side he sprang and laid his solution before them.

"Panama behind peacocks tail San Francisco. What does that mean? Which of you has been in Panama?"

"I," said Louis d'Or.

"What could a peacock in Panama mean?"

"You have the message wrong," said the Irishman. "What would the meaning be in such a thing?"

Kildare looked down at his encrusted hands and began to wash them in the sea water.

"Try again," he said. "What does San Francisco have to do with Panama?"

"THERE'S a church of San Francisco in Panama," said Louis d'Or. "A Franciscan church, at any rate. Would that answer?"

"Ah," said Kildare. "Of course it answers. In Panama in the Church of St. Francis—there's the start. Well,

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in the Church of St. Francis in Panama there is a peacock, believe it if you can. And behind the tail of the peacock is the treasure of Tranquillo."

"In the church?" shouted the Irishman. "Why would the fool hide it in a church?"

"Where would a man be less likely to look for treasure than in one of the nooks and crannies of a church?" asked Louis d'Or. "The thing's done, my lads! Somewhere in the church of San Francisco in Panama. Somewhere we find a peacock—done in stone, most likely. And behind the peacock's tail is the treasure of that poor Tranquillo! Hai, Tranquillo the Second — why would the fool write down such things? He could remember his secret, couldn't he?"

"Why," said Kildare, "the life of a buccaneer is not much surer than a candle in a blowing wind. And it may be that Tranquillo had a partner in the adventure and that they agreed between them to leave some record of what they had done and where they had lodged the treasure."

"Aye," said Louis d'Or, "and suppose also that Tranquillo with his lot was a hunted man through the streets of Panama—as any but a Spaniard is apt to be chased—he might very well have slipped into the bigness of the church to hide himself."

"And now?" said the Irishman. "Why should we rub our hands and warm ourselves as if we had a fire on a cold night? It's a long cry from here to Panama—and damned hard for a man to get into the town if he has an English look about him."

"The treasure is not ours, but it shall be," answered Louis d'Or. "Shall we go to the anchorage and try to exchange this periagua for a smaller canoa, perhaps?"

"No," said Kildare, "but we can pick up a few extra hands and make the voyage in this boat. She's as quick as a fish in the water. And she'll ride lighter with a smaller crew.—What are you thinking of, Louis d'Or?"

"Of Johann, and how he went down. The dog! I fed him when he was starving."

"He's a fire-eater," said the Irishman, "and where he is now, he'll never starve again."

After that, no one of them ever spoke again of the dead men on the beach.

CHAPTER VII.

TOWARD PORTO BELLO.

WHEN they went down the beach, well weighted down by the load of weapons which they were carrying, they were amazed to find that the periagua was gone, and Luis, of course, with it. The Irishman and Louis d'Or began to curse the Mosquito, but Kildare told them, simply:

"If he's gone, it's because he was taken. What's been happening behind this headland we can't tell. Men may have come coasting toward the town and picked up the periagua on the way. It had the look that would take the eye of any Brother of the Coast."

They cached the weapons they did not need and went on up the beach rapidly until, rounding a little peninsula, they came in view of the town of Tortuga, which had been whittled out of the jungle by the labor of buccaneers and their slaves and apprentices.

Kildare, as he saw the place, remembered how, on a day, he had fought the real Tranquillo for the right to use

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that name; and he gripped his fists so hard that the newly healed wounds in the hollow of his left hand began to burn and ache.

It was as quiet a looking place as one could wish to see. It had not streets, really, but green strips of ground that wandered among the houses, and the houses themselves were little huts carelessly built, for the most part, except where some merchant had put up an ambitious warehouse near the water's edge. Under the trees hammocks were hung; a few wisps of smoke floated softly away over the roofs; an odor of cookery clung in the air. It was the sort of a place that made men relax body and mind.

And yet the work was going forward. Through the palms that shaded the huts here and there Kildare could see the glimpses of the rolling land, and the swaying figures which flashed hoes up and down monotonously, cultivating the acres of maize or of tobacco.

On the beach, newly dragged up from the sea, lay the periagua.

"You see," said Kildare, "that there were a good many hands at work on this business. If Luis had stolen the periagua, he never could have drawn it up onto the shore."

"Shall we take the boat and leave?" asked the Irishman. "Or shall we try to find the thieves and fight 'em?"

He asked with a perfect indifference as to the answer.

"Find them, and fight 'em if we have to," said the Frenchman.

They looked into the periagua and saw that its stock of muskets, ammunition, food, and all the essential supplies of a voyage were still intact. Only Luis was gone.

So the three advanced into Tortuga. They were guided by a growing uproar of voices, loud laughter, shouts; they saw a gathered crowd of such tatterdemalions as it would have been hard to find again in any part of the world.

Some of them were in the blood-stained cotton shirts and drawers of the true buccaneers, recently returned from curing beef and pork in the forests of Hispaniola; others had bought new clothes from the merchants who traded at Tortuga, and every wild color, from crimson to staring yellow was on the backs of the dandies of the Coast.

From a distance, through a gap in the crowd, the three could see what was going forward.

AN Indian was tied to a pole by a rope that bound one wrist. The other hand and his legs were free, and he had in his hand a short stick. Ten paces from him a stalwart buccaneer was bending a bow, drawing the arrows to the head and shooting them with a practiced hand straight at the Indian.

The fellow helped himself by twisting and dodging in a marvelous manner, but with his stick he struck aside every arrow as it leaped at him.

"That's a Mosquito Indian," said Louis d'Or.

"It's my man!" shouted Kildare, and came up on the run, his friends at his shoulder.

The man with the bow had stopped, wiped his forehead, damned the heat, and called for brandy from his valet—because every self-respecting buccaneer, when he was ashore or hunting pork and beef in the woods of Hispaniola, kept a body servant who was kicked and beaten through a long novitiate until he was hardened to a sufficient brutality and then became a full-

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fledged master buccaneer. The archer tossed off a dram of French brandy and announced:

"When I was a lad, we used to amuse ourselves shooting at pigeons tied to a string, and if I can't hit a full-sized Indian may I be damned to hell and back. Now for you!"

He took a whole step nearer and began to draw his arrow to the head. The buccaneers shouted in anticipation and leaned forward to watch. Some of them were so newly come from hunting that they had not yet become properly drunk.

They looked like barbarians who had just plundered a civilized town and dressed themselves in the booty. This was the moment when Kildare came up on the run, shouting out that he would put a pistol bullet through the buccaneer if another arrow were fired at Luis.

The Mosquito, crouched in an agony of suspense, tense to make the next parry of the flying shaft, straightened a little.

"Hold your tongue," said the archer. "Are you one of the fools that loves Indians?"

"I don't love them, but I hate to waste them," said Kildare. "And every man here knows that a Mosquito with his spear and irons can keep a hundred head of men in fish on a decent voyage."

"Keep your talk to yourself," said the buccaneer.

"I'd rather split your tongue than hold my own," said Kildare.

The whole crowd started. "Do you hear him, Pierre?" shouted one.

Pierre, wheeling about more slowly, dropped his bow and arrow to the ground.

"Here, boy," he said to his valet, "reach me my sword."

A long, heavy cutlass was instantly put into his grasp.

"Now stand out if you dare and tell me what you are and who you are that comes between a man and his judgment on his own slave!" exclaimed Pierre.

"LET me take this fight," said the Irishman at the ear of Kildare.

"Let it be my quarrel!" murmured Louis d'Or on the opposite side.

Kildare stepped out into the open circle.

"I am Captain Tranquillo," said Kildare.

Pierre laughed.

"Then I'm Cæsar and Hannibal all in one," he said. "Why, you lying fool, Tranquillo would make two of you! He could hold enough brandy to drown you!"

"Wait!" called out a buccaneer. "This is the Englishman who chose to call himself Tranquillo and fought here with the other Tranquillo for the right to the name, and beat him!"

"Then the true Tranquillo was drunk," said Pierre. "Step up to me, liar!"

He made two or three cuts in the air with his cutlass as he spoke, and Kildare unsheathed that delicate sword of his which had drunk so much blood already this day. The sight of it had a wonderful effect on Pierre. He was a man all jowls and no brain, and a bush of whiskers made his head seem to grow directly out of his shoulders. When he saw the narrow sword in the hand of Kildare, he grunted like a pig.

"Are you ready?" he shouted. "Is that damned needle what you hope to fight with? Come to me, Tranquillo, and I'll lay you tranquil for the rest of your life with one stroke."

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"You're drunk," said Kildare. "But tell me first what claim you have on this friend of mine, this Luis?"

"He's a Mosquito Indian, isn't he?" demanded Pierre.

"He is that. And what of it?"

"This of it! Was not my own Brother of the Coast murdered last year?"

"I know nothing about that," said Kildare.

"I tell you now. He was murdered. And it was a cursed Mosquito Indian that waited behind a bush and speared him through the throat just as he was taking a drink of brandy in the light of the burning hut."

"Your friend had burned down the Indian's hut?" asked Kildare.

"Yes. Because it was a wet night and we needed heat to dry our clothes.—I say that a Mosquito Indian murdered him, and I swore that I would kill the next Mosquito that I ever met.—Is that justice?"

THERE was a bawling shout from all the true democrats who stood around the place. "Justice! This is a judgment!"

"Very well," said Kildare, "if this is justice, let me fight for my share of it. Are you ready?"

"Ready—and not waiting!" shouted the buccaneer, and charged like a bull.

Kildare, without bothering to parry the tremendous, sweeping blow of the cutlass, side-stepped it and touched the buccaneer just between the eyes; a little trickle of blood was running down the face of the big fellow as he turned, roaring.

"That touch ought to sober you," said Kildare. "Guard yourself!"

The buccaneer, in fact, now came in more cautiously and delivered a sudden attack with great skill and judgment. The blow slithered off the supple blade of Kildare like bright drops of water.

A great shouting began to go up. "A master! A master of the sword! Pierre, you are up against witchcraft!"

Pierre suddenly drew back, uttered a cry of fury, and then flung himself in for a final effort. The rapier of Kildare leaped in and out. Pierre, ending his charge, dropped his cutlass and grasped his sword arm above the wrist. Blood forced its way through his fingers.

"Have I paid the price for Luis?" asked Kildare.

There was another universal shouting.

"Teach me one of your damned dancing tricks," said the defeated buccaneer, "and I'd give up the slaughter of a hundred Mosquitoes. Take the Indian, if you want him, and may he cut your throat for you before you're a day older."

"I take also," said Kildare, "the periagua that you and your friends carried off, and Luis along with it."

"Take what you please," said Pierre, "and be damned while you take it!"

He turned on his heel and strode away; a moment later Luis was free. But he showed not the slightest sign of rejoicing; he merely fixed on Kildare a long, bright, considering look, as though a great thought had just entered his mind.

It was a temptation for them to remain in Tortuga and relax with the good French brandy and enjoy the lazy life; but after they had bought a few supplies, on the same day of their coming they left the island, their crew rounded out by François, a strong, husky mulatto they had bought.

It was after they had left that the

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report came in about the dead men on the beach, and that was the origin of the story which presently traveled as far as the winds blow all over the Caribbean Sea and across the mainland.

The legend told how three men had fought eighteen and left the eighteen dead, while only two of the three were so much as scratched.

It never occurred to a single man that among the dead might lie some of those who had fought with the minority.

THEY had little wind, but enough to give them steerageway day after day, and they used the lazy hours of leisure to elaborate their plans. As for Kildare, he wished merely to be taken to Porto Bello, where, he was sure, Inez Heredia had been carried before him. If she were gone, he first would cross the Isthmus with his two companions and make the wild attempt to find the treasure of Tranquillo. And after that they would help him, as in honor bound, to recover his lady. This compact they made in detail.

The mulatto and the Indian, after they reached the western coast, would be left to guard the periagua after it had been beached and hidden away in some obscure place.

They might not be able to trust François farther than they could see him, but the Mosquito Indian was a rock of trust.

Luis, couched in the bows with his pronged spear ready, kept them in more fresh fish than they could eat. He helped to kill time for them, also, by telling them—in the starlight, which was the only time when he would talk—stories about the life of his people.

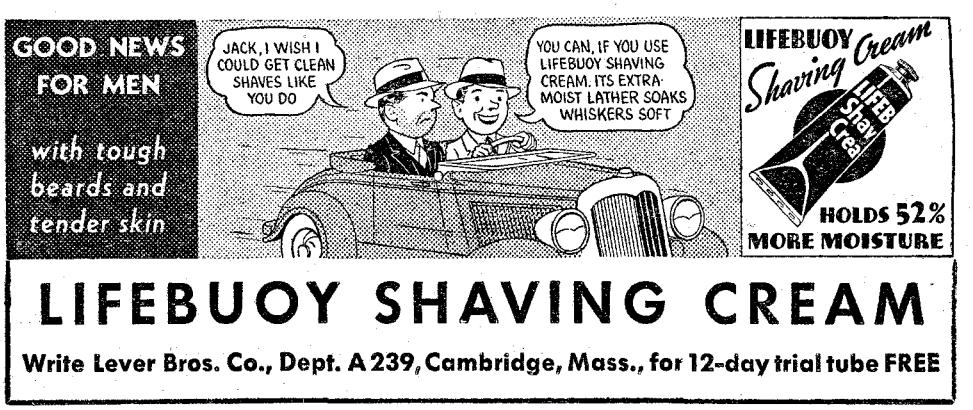
The last day came, with a good wind at last bowling them forward, and the periagua leaping along like a flying fish, when the Mosquito Indian cried out that he could see the shore.

Actually, the others strained their eyes for another fifteen minutes before they could make out the loom of the land, so wonderfully acute were the eyes of the Indian.

At last they saw opening the mouth of the fine bay of Porto Bello, and the hills that ringed the city around with a fine mist creeping upward, like a smoke from the city.

Here their next adventure was to take place. They became grim and silent as they stared toward the land.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK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DARING
By Stookie Allen
BIRDMAN
Charles Sherman Jones—better known as "Casey"—is rated by airmen as more than "just another flyer." War aviator, crack racing pilot, flying instructor and able business man, Jones has contributed materially to flying.
"CASEY"
BORN IN VERMONT, IN 1894, HE PASSED UP THE SLATE BUSINESS OF HIS FATHER AND SET OUT TO BE A LAWYER. IN COLLEGE HE WAS A STAR ATHLETE, WINNING 12 VARSITY LETTERS BY EXCELLING IN BASEBALL, FOOTBALL AND TRACK. HE LATER BECAME A PHYSICAL INSTRUCTOR.
IN 1912 WHILE IN SCHOOL, JONES LEARNED TO FLY A PLANE OWNED BY A CLASSMATE. BUT AFTER HIS PAL AND ANOTHER FELLOW WERE KILLED IN A CRASH, YOUNG JONES GAVE UP ALL IDEA OF FLYING FOR THE TIME. THE MONICKER "CASEY" CAME TO HIM IN HIS MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE DAYS WHEN HE USED TO SING AND PLAY THE FAMOUS "CASEY JONES" DITTY ON THE PIANO.

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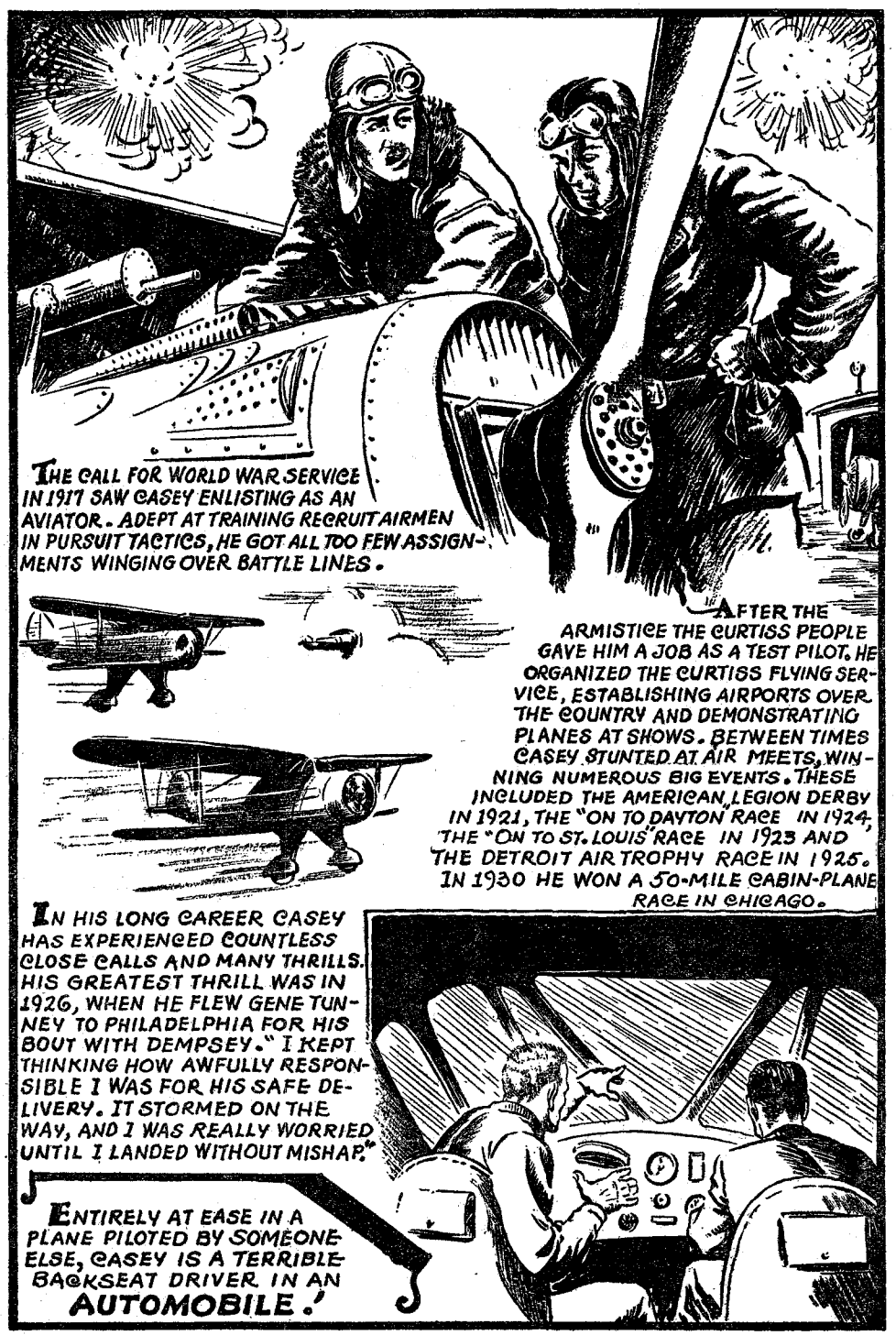
THE CALL FOR WORLD WAR SERVICE IN 1917 SAW CASEY ENLISTING AS AN AVIATOR. ADEPT AT TRAINING RECRUIT AIRMEN IN PURSUIT TACTICS, HE GOT ALL TOO FEW ASSIGNMENTS WINGING OVER BATTLE LINES.
AFTER THE ARMISTICE THE CURTISS PEOPLE GAVE HIM A JOB AS A TEST PILOT. HE ORGANIZED THE CURTISS FLYING SERVICE, ESTABLISHING AIRPORTS OVER THE COUNTRY AND DEMONSTRATING PLANES AT SHOWS. BETWEEN TIMES CASEY STUNTED AT AIR MEETS, WINNING NUMEROUS BIG EVENTS. THESE INCLUDED THE AMERICAN LEGION DERBY IN 1921, THE "ON TO DAYTON" RACE IN 1924, THE "ON TO ST. LOUIS" RACE IN 1923 AND THE DETROIT AIR TROPHY RACE IN 1925. IN 1930 HE WON A 50-MILE CABIN-PLANE RACE IN CHICAGO.
IN HIS LONG CAREER CASEY HAS EXPERIENCED COUNTLESS CLOSE CALLS AND MANY THRILLS. HIS GREATEST THRILL WAS IN 1926, WHEN HE FLEW GENE TUNNEY TO PHILADELPHIA FOR HIS BOUT WITH DEMPSEY. "I KEPT THINKING HOW AWFULLY RESPONSIBLE I WAS FOR HIS SAFE DELIVERY. IT STORMED ON THE WAY, AND I WAS REALLY WORRIED UNTIL I LANDED WITHOUT MISHAP."
ENTIRELY AT EASE IN A PLANE PILOTED BY SOMEONE ELSE, CASEY IS A TERRIBLE BACKSEAT DRIVER IN AN AUTOMOBILE!

Next Week: Simon Lake, Subsea Wizard

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The Gold Fist

By

GEORGE F. WORTS

It was the archaeologist on the floor

Homer Lassiter possessed a strange and terrible power—he could tell by looking at people when they were doomed to death

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

SOON after inheriting $15,000,000 from his Uncle Ben, young Bill Lassiter, of Park Avenue, New York, made a wager with his uncle's former secretary, a girl named Ladorna Whipple, that he could earn $50,000 during the next twelve months by his own efforts and honestly. Confidently Bill staked his inheri-

This story began in the Argosy for August 31

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tance against hers of two million, careless of the fact that the loss of his fortune would mean the closing of his uncle's pet charity, the Happy Hundred home for orphans.

Eleven months and one week later found him in Peru, dejected, with only a few dollars, his efforts to promote a mine having ended in his being swindled out of a $50,000 commission. It was then that he unexpectedly gained possession of the Gold Fist, an Inca relic worth millions because of a forgotten scientific principle sealed within it in the form of a cipher, a knotted cord.

On a ship bound for New York, where he had been offered $100,000 for the fist—and its principle—Bill found himself under scrutiny by a band of super-criminals of whom one was Ramon Amador. Eluding Amador, Bill reached his penthouse safely. Here he received a cryptic telephone message from Joanna, a girl with whom he had fallen in love, though she cloaked herself in mystery. Fearing for her, Bill put detectives on her trail and that of a Mr. and Mrs. Chine, by whom Joanna had once been held captive.

Hoping to decipher the fist's secret in time to sell it and fulfill his wager, Bill sent for his cousin, Homer Lassiter, a scientist who worked with ultra-violet rays. Homer arrived in agitation, having just discovered that his eyes had the remarkable property of blurring the face of a person about to die. He directed Bill to an archæologist, Dr. Bruce Orwood, who timidly agreed to examine the fist later. When Bill left Orwood's house, the Gold Fist still in his pocket, he was attacked by a gang of men and left unconscious.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRACING A GIRL.

A GREAT many people, men, women and children, had gathered about Bill.

Two policemen made a lane so that the interne could reach Bill. "He had a mixup with three Mexicans," one of the policemen said.

"They looked more like Cubans to me," the other officer said.

"Well, they were from one of them hot countries."

"Where are they?" the interne asked.

"They got away," the first policeman answered.

"How long has this guy been out?"

"A good fifteen minutes. He acts doped."

"I'm not out," Bill said.

The interne took Bill by the shoulders and shook him violently. He said, "Buddy, you've got to watch your step when you play around with these Mex girls."

And Bill murmured amiably, "But, buddy, I don't know any Mex girls."

The ambulance man took Bill to the ambulance, and poured a white liquid into a tumbler, then added water. He said, "Drink it."

Bill drank the pungent stuff. It cleared his head very quickly. A feeling of unreality and confusion dropped away.

There were no more moonbeams or moonmen. Gramercy Park was, once again, misty; and the clamor of the orchestra he had seemed to hear was no longer audible.

A policeman said, "Are you going to take this guy in?"

"No," the interne answered. "He's all right. It'll all wear off in a few minutes. But you be careful after this, buddy, who you do your drinking with. So long and good luck, buddy."

"So long and good luck to you, buddy," Bill said.

The fist was still in his pocket.

The ambulance departed. The two policemen scattered the crowd. Then one of them came over to Bill, who still stood by the fence taking deep breaths of air.

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The policeman said, "Say, ain't you William J. Lassiter?"

"Yes."

"I read about you in the paper. You're the guy who made that bet! Are you gonna win it, Mr. Lassiter?"

"I've got to win it," Bill said.

Again he started for the subway station. He had not gone far when he discovered that he was again being followed.

A tall, thin man with a black mustache was tagging along almost at his heels. Anger took possession of Bill. Then he recalled an old trick for eluding such a pursuer.

Reaching the subway kiosk, he went down the stairs, dropped a nickel in a turnstile, and went out onto the platform. A moment later the tall, thin man came down the stairs, went through a turnstile, walked to a spot twenty or thirty feet away from Bill, and began to read an afternoon newspaper.

When a train came Bill entered a car by one of the central doors. The dark-skinned man entered the same car by a rear door.

Just as the doors were closing Bill slipped out. The train left with the dark-skinned man aboard. Bill saw his dark face pressed against one of the rear door windows, and grinned at him.

The man did not grin in return.

BILL left the subway and took a taxicab downtown. On the way his mind cleared, and it occurred to him that Dr. Orwood might also have had an experience with moonmen, and not come off so fortunately. He told the cab driver to stop, and went into a drugstore and telephoned the archæologist.

Dr. Orwood answered the phone.

"I have almost finished the translation," he said. "It will be ready at five o'clock."

Bill was a little dubious. "You don't hear loud music or see any moonbeams, do you?"

"What's that?"

When Bill had described his unearthly adventure, Dr. Orwood said grimly, "That was doubtless South American hemp. Felipe must have put it into your highball. I will attend to him at once. Mr. Lassiter, I warned you that this is very dangerous; I shall stay behind locked doors until you call."

Bill left the telepone booth and proceeded to the offices of the New York *Globe*, the city editor of which was an old friend.

The city editor welcomed Bill with a joyous shout.

"I was just reading about you," he said, indicating a four-star edition still fragrant from the press. "Are you going to win that bet?"

"Yep."

"How are you going to do it?"

Bill shrugged mysteriously and asked to be taken to the morgue, or reference department. At the morgue he asked to see photographs of all the débutantes of the past five seasons.

This quest was decidedly a needle-in-the-haystack sort of undertaking, but Bill was acting on a sound hunch. He believed that Joanna had been, within recent years, a débutante. In his two meetings with her she had impressed him not only with her beauty and her mystery but her poise. It was the kind of poise that can be acquired only in cultured surroundings. Doubtless, Joanna was the product of a finishing school.

The keeper of the morgue brought Bill piles of débutantes' photographs.

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There were blond girls and brunette girls, plump girls and thin girls, pretty girls and homely girls in this parade of debutantes for the years 1930 to 1934, inclusive.

It was dusty and discouraging work. So many of them looked alike. So many of them looked so haughty. As Bill thumbed through pile after pile of photographs and clippings, he wondered why there were so many debutantes. What good did it do them? What good did they do anybody else? Why were such enormous sums of money lavished on these rather uniformly empty-faced girls?

He was disgusted and tired when, suddenly, a pair of clear dark eyes seemed to leap across great distances to him.

It was Joanna.

THERE was no question about it. The lovely face was smiling mysteriously, and the eyes had a dreamy look, as if they were gazing at far horizons. How different she was from these others!

Her name was Joanna Trowbridge. She had been introduced to society by her grandmother, Mrs. Russell Trowbridge, on December 28, 1932.

Bill ran to the nearest telephone directory. He found Mrs. Russell Trowbridge's number and called it.

A butler answered.

Bill said, "Miss Joanna Trowbridge, please."

There was a long hesitation at the other end. Then, "Miss Trowbridge is not here. Who is this?"

"An old friend."

There was a longer silence. Then another voice came on the wire—a cracked old voice.

"Who is this?"

"William J. Lassiter. Is this Mrs. Trowbridge? I believe you knew my Uncle Ben, Mrs. Trowbridge. I met your granddaughter in Peru and I'm anxious to see her. It's quite urgent."

"Has it anything to do with a gold fist?"

Bill's heart gave a thump. "It has," he said.

"Where is it?" Mrs. Trowbridge snapped.

"Where is your granddaughter?" Bill countered.

Mrs. Trowbridge hesitated. "She left a half hour ago to go somewhere for cocktails."

"A party or a cocktail bar?"

"A cocktail bar. Have you the fist?"

"I'll discuss everything with Joanna," Bill replied, and lowered the hook with his finger.

Bill glanced at his watch. Four o'clock! Eight hours to midnight.

Time! Plenty of time! He must find her!

Bill began a tour of the more fashionable cocktail bars. In his absence, cocktail bars had sprung up, it seemed to him, on every corner.

The first bar he tried was the Rainbow Room, on the sixty-fifth floor of Radio City. Joanna was not there. He tried the Weylin Bar, the Stork, and the Oasis at the Waldorf. He tried the Madison and the Sherry-Netherlands. In the Sazarin, he took a table and ordered a Sazarin Special. He didn't know what was in a Sazarin Special except sloe gin. Nothing else about it was slow.

It reached its mark and immediately made history.

Bill ordered another and listened to the soft murmur of voices and watched the pretty, smartly dressed girls who came and went.

He was about to leave and try the

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Ritz, when a girl passed him, a girl with chestnut hair under one of the currently popular ridiculous hats, trailing a fragrance of some costly perfume.

Something reminiscent about that scent caused Bill to look at her sharply. The girl in the mink coat sat down across the room from him, facing him. She looked at Bill, and their eyes locked.

She stared at him with amazement, then dropped her long lashes, took a cigarette from a jeweled case, and, placing it to her lips, bent forward a little for the light her escort held ready. She was pale. She was Joanna!

CHAPTER IX.

JOANNA EXPLAINS.

BILL hardly glanced at her escort. He was a blond man, and he had that familiar look. He might have been any blond man in any cocktail bar in New York at the moment.

The girl looked up as Bill neared her table, and there was terror in her beautiful eyes.

Bill said, "Hello, Joanna."

The girl was looking at him coolly.

"I think," she said, in the low voice the music of which had thrilled Bill so, "you've made a mistake."

"You mean," Bill said, "you don't know me."

Her eyes became icy. She said nothing.

Bill said nothing. The blond man was staring at him as if he intended to jump up and punch Bill.

Returning to his table, Bill sat down and ordered another Sazarin Special.

A waiter brought his drink. A moment later, another waiter placed beside it a little silver dish of salted peanuts. Bill idly ate a peanut, then discovered the corner of a piece of paper protruding up through the small mound of peanuts from the bottom of the dish. He pulled it out. It was a piece of paper folded several times, into a small lozenge.

He unfolded it and read:

> I'm terribly sorry—and terribly grateful. But don't worry about me, or try to get in touch. It would be dangerous for both of us. I am being systematically followed and watched, and I cannot let you be involved. JOANNA.

Bill looked up in time to see her and the blond man going out the door. Bill dropped a bill on the table, picked up his hat and followed.

He followed Joanna and her escort through the large lobby of the Sazarin, and his eyes were as busy as the shuttle of a loom. He presently saw a man rise as Joanna and her escort passed—a short, heavy-set man. He got up a little too nonchalantly, he fell in behind Joanna and the blond man a little too casually.

Bill followed them out to the sidewalk. Joanna and her escort got into a cab. It drove away. The short man got into another cab, and it drove away.

Bill got into a third cab, and said, "Follow that black cab."

It went up Park Avenue. Bill lost sight of the cab Joanna had taken, but he didn't think it greatly mattered. He saw the black cab turn into a rather dark cross street. Halfway down the block it stopped. This had been at one time, before repeal, a speakeasy neighborhood. Many of the speakeasies had been converted into cocktail bars. He saw Joanna and the blond man get out of their cab and go down a few steps and enter a door. Bill knew the place.

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Rather, he had once known it. It had been Antoine's speakeasy. It was now Antoine's cocktail bar.

He paid off his cab and jumped out as the black cab ahead pulled into the curb. Bill was at the door of the black cab as it opened. The taxi driver was still looking ahead as Bill opened the door and as the heavy-set man started to get out.

THE backfiring of the exhaust of the cab that Joanna and her escort had just left muffled the sharp sound of Bill's fist meeting the chin of the heavy-set man. The heavy-set man sank back into the seat limply.

Just then the driver turned and said, "What the hell's goin' on here?"

"The gentleman," Bill answered, "says he wants to be taken to the Metropolitan Opera House."

"It's closed."

"Mr. Johnston, the new director, wants to give him an audition. He's a tenor. And Mr. Johnston is waiting. Step on it!"

He waited for the cab to start, then went into Antoine's. He saw Joanna just seating herself at the far end of the room, the blond man hovering over her.

Antoine came trotting over to Bill. He was an effusive little Frenchman. "Mr. Lassiter!" he cried. "*Mon Dieu!* But I am delighted to see you again!"

"Sh-h-h," Bill said, and took Antoine into the coatroom. "Antoine, do you know the young lady who just came in?"

"But certainly, *m'sieu'!* She is Miss Trowbridge!"

"Who's the fellow with her?"

"The blond man? That is Andrew Grayson, *m'sieu'.*"

"Not the son of John B. Grayson!"

"*Oui, oui!*"

"Go in there and tell him," Bill directed rapidly, "that his father just telephoned. Tell him his father has been trying every cocktail bar in town, to find him. Tell him his father wants to see him at once, urgently, at the Century Club. Have you got it straight?"

"*Oui, m'sieu'.* And if *mademoiselle—?*"

"If she starts to go with him, tell her it is very urgent that she remain; that some one is about to deliver a message of great importance to her. But don't mention my name, Antoine. I want to surprise her."

Antoine was French, and a lover of romantic intrigue. He rubbed his hands, laughed silently and tiptoed out of the coatroom.

Bill waited. He heard voices, then footsteps, then the closing of the street door. The coatroom door flew open, and Antoine, beaming with delight, cried, "*M'sieu'!* The coast, she is clear! *Allez!*"

Bill sauntered down the room to where Joanna sat alone at a table, looking both scared and bewildered. When she saw Bill, her eyes became angry. She jumped up.

"The fellow who was following you," Bill said, "is being delivered to the Metropolitan Opera House. Come with me."

"Where?"

"Where we can have a nice, cozy little talk."

Joanna looked at Bill with a mixture of amusement and impatience. Her face was flushed. Her fine dark eyes were sparkling. It was evident that something about Bill both amused and irritated her. Though she made her

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mouth stern, her eyes continued to sparkle.

"Honestly, I can't waste the time," she said.

"Is that any way to talk," Bill asked, "about a moment that you will look back on with dewy-eyed rapture for the rest of your life?"

"But, Bill, I'm too busy to flirt with you this evening. Make it tomorrow evening. I'll promise to flirt with you continuously from four to six."

"I never flirt from four to six," Bill said. "Those are my office hours. Come along. We have until just five."

HE helped her into her coat, took her firmly by the arm, and guided her out to the sidewalk.

"You're amazing," the Trowbridge girl said. "The papers say that if you don't make fifty thousand dollars by midnight tonight, you're going to lose the fortune your uncle left you—Mr. Howard Blangdon. Why are you wasting your time?"

"But I'm not wasting it, Joanna."

"Oh," she said. "Am I going to help you make fifty thousand dollars?"

"You are a source," Bill answered, "of inspiration. Pile in, Joanna."

He opened the door of the taxi at the curb, made sure that she did not slip out the door on the other side, and gave the driver the address of the most obscure cocktail bar he knew of. The girl of mystery eyed him with large brown eyes as Bill seated himself beside her.

"Besides," Bill said, "I am entitled to an explanation. This old frame of mine can stand only so much suspense."

"Yes," she agreed, "you're entitled to an explanation."

"And I want to help, too, Joanna."

Joanna said nothing. The taxi was stopping before Jacque's. Bill kept an alert eye on Joanna as he paid off the taxi driver. He guided her into Jacque's, which was practically deserted, and selected a table in the most obscure corner of the room.

When the waiter had taken their order, Bill said briskly, "Now—let's have both barrels. What were you doing on that ship as a crazy girl? And who are the Chines? And why did they turn you loose? What's it all about? Maybe I can help."

Joanna sighed. She had the look of a girl who feels she might as well surrender to the inevitable. And even her air of ennui delighted Bill. He hoped he wasn't mistaken. And he had decided that he was far from mistaken. At any distance, from any angle, Joanna was lovelier than he had remembered her.

"All right," she said, "I'll tell you. But I assure you, you can't help."

"You might be surprised."

"I assure you, I would be. I know how willing you are to help."

She paused there, as if there were more to say, but she was controlling herself. Bill knew what she meant. She looked on him as a gallumphing, bungling nuisance, and infatuated young man who was determined to butt into everything she did. What she didn't know was that the Bill Lassiter of today was a vastly different man from the Bill Lassiter of a few months ago. It would be hard for her to realize what a grim and desperate man that playboy had become.

He watched her. She seemed reluctant to begin. It was as if she were reliving some shocking experience and found it too painful to discuss. Her color was heightened. Her large brown eyes were brighter. She was not the

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dramatic type, yet all of this somehow made her seem tremendously dramatic to Bill.

"It is hard to know where to begin," she said. "I suppose you did not suspect that Mrs. Chine is not really Mr. Chine's wife, but his half-sister."

"No," Bill answered. "I didn't suspect that. Is Chine actually their name?"

"Yes. I'll try to explain. It's all rather complex. And some of it is still rather hard for me to understand."

THE girl's lips were parted as if with breathless excitement. Bill could see the pulse beating rapidly in her slender white throat. She moistened her lips.

"It all began quite a number of years ago—when I was attending Mrs. Tinche's finishing school. One of my classmates was a girl whom I resembled so closely that even our teachers could hardly tell us apart. Actually, we were doubles. We became close friends, and after we left school we remained close friends."

"Her name?" Bill interrupted.

"Sylvia Radkin."

"The name you went under on the passenger list on the City of Para."

"Yes. A few months ago Sylvia went to Lima, to marry a young mining engineer. But this man Chine wanted to marry Sylvia for her money. She is worth countless millions. It seems that he had some powerful influence, some kind of hypnotic influence I suppose it was, over her, and he was of course opposed to her marrying the mining engineer. The long and short of it was that Chine went to Lima to prevent her marrying—to get her for himself."

Bill said, "Sounds like a thorough villain."

"He is a thorough villain. He is a monster. Sylvia knew that Chine was coming to Lima to get her. She was frantic. On her arrival in Lima she found that her fiancé had gone off on a geological trip into the Andes—a place utterly inaccessible to her. He was not there to protect her, so—so she sent for me.

"I went. I went to be the sacrificial victim. You understand, of course, that I'd do anything for Sylvia. When the Chines reached Lima and looked for Sylvia, they found me—masquerading as Sylvia."

"You fooled them completely," Bill guessed.

"I did. I put up a very convincing demonstration of a girl half insane with terror. That was when you met me. You remember."

"I'll always remember."

The waiter brought their drinks.

Joanna waited until he had gone, then continued.

"It was necessary, of course, for the Chines to get me away from Lima before Sylvia's fiancé returned from his expedition. That was why they put me in a straitjacket, and took me aboard the ship and told everyone I was dangerously insane.

"And it was simply because of Sylvia that I let them do such a monstrous thing. I knew that when we reached New York it would be easy for me to prove he had the wrong girl, and that he would let me go. By that time Sylvia and Larry would be married, and she would be safe from Chine forever."

"Why," Bill broke in, "did you send me that note this morning?"

"I was afraid of him—his hypnotic influence. He was strange and sinister. He was always practicing weird occult religious rites with that half-sister of his."

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"And is that," Bill asked, "why you wouldn't let me see you in Lima—because you were already under his power?"

"Yes," Joanna answered. "It's like a dreadful dream now—the incense smoke rising from the brazier and a green glow beginning to appear in the crystal ball, and that awful sound of distant singing—"

Bill watched her face with admiration and delight. It made him angry that he didn't realize, in Lima, that she was as beautiful as this.

"Joanna," Bill said tenderly, "let's stop lying now, and talk about this for a while."

He removed the gold fist from his pocket, placed it on the table beside his cocktail, and watched Joanna's face.

CHAPTER X.

MURDER.

HER air of animation vanished. The color flowed out of her face. It flowed back until her face was crimson. Her eyes grew larger and larger. Then she blinked them. Then she uttered a faint, half-strangled squeal.

She made a sudden grab for the gold hand. Her fingers closed greedily about it.

But Bill's hand had pounced the same instant hers had, and he firmly held her hand now.

"Drop it," he said sternly. "Drop it, Joanna, or I'll break every bone in your hand."

Without resentment, she dropped it. The fist fell with a thud to the table. Her face was crimson with excitement. Her eyes were all a-gleam and a-glitter.

He could see her slim young bosom rising and falling with the motion of it.

"The quipu!" she panted. "Is the quipu in it?"

Bill touched the thumb nail and the little finger knuckle. The small gate flipped open. Joanna peered inside.

"Gone!" she wailed.

"I will take you to where it is in a little while," Bill assured her. "Now let's get down to brass tacks, Joanna. Let's come clean about all this intrigue. Maybe we can do business. Just tell me all you know, and I'll tell you all I know. If you don't want to, Joanna, I'll walk out right now with this thing."

"You!" Joanna panted. "You! Where did you get this?" She was recovering rapidly from her first amazement. "It's mine! Give it to me!"

"Okay, Joanna," Bill said in a voice of finality. He picked up the gold fist, dropped it into his pocket, and got up with the air of a man about to depart.

"No, no!" she cried. "Wait a minute. Please, Bill, don't go. Let's—let's talk about it. Let's see if we can't arrive at some agreement."

"First of all," Bill said, "let's be absolutely truthful. The entire story was a lie, wasn't it?"

"Yes."

"There is no Sylvia Radkin."

"No."

"And Mrs. Chine is actually Mr. Chine's wife, not his half-sister?"

"That's right."

"Who is Chine?"

"My uncle."

"Okay. Let's hear about this fist."

Bill settled back in his chair, but his eyes were alert and wary.

"Any agreement we arrive at," he

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added, "would depend, of course, on how you came by it. Supposing you tell me just how you came by it."

TEARS came into Joanna's lovely eyes.

"It belonged to my grandfather," she said. "He found it in Peru when he was a young man. He hid it down there because he was wealthy and didn't need the money."

"Did he know what it was?" Bill interrupted.

"No. Not exactly. But he suspected. He knew it was of terrific value. But he decided to hide it down there and, if he ever needed money, to get it. But he made more and more money. He died, as you probably know, worth millions. And he never went back for the hand. But he left detailed directions how to find it and what to do with it if any of his heirs should ever be in want."

"And are you in want?" Bill asked.

She said proudly, "The Trowbridges never discuss their financial affairs. But I assure you, we are in want. If you wanted to help me as much as you say you do, you'd give me the fist."

"If you can prove that it's yours honestly, you'll get it."

"But it is honestly mine," she said, and Bill saw that she was holding her emotions in check with a great effort.

"Prove it, Joanna."

She held her chin proudly. "Grandmother and I found the document behind a sliding panel."

"What document?"

"The document my grandfather left in case any of his heirs were in dire want. It told how to find the fist in this ancient Inca village, high in the Andes."

Bill started to get up again.

"Wait!" Joanna wailed. "I'll tell you the truth. I promise."

"Your grandfather had nothing to do with it," Bill said.

"No—no, he didn't have anything to do with it at all. It hasn't anything to do with my grandfather."

"Nor a sliding panel."

"There isn't any sliding panel. I promise to tell you the truth, Bill."

And Bill somehow sensed that Joanna meant it this time.

"I got wind of it," she said, "never mind where. I mean, it isn't important. A Peruvian I met at a dinner party got drunk and told me about it."

"In New York?"

"Yes. I learned that an old hermit in Cerro de Pasca owned it. And was terrified to do anything with it. It's like the Kohinoor, or any of these other priceless gems that leave trails of blood and murder in their wake. It came originally from Machu Picchu, a lost city in the heights of the Andes that was discovered by an expedition sent by Yale, I think, in 1911. I've always been interested in the Incas. They were the most wonderful race that ever lived on the whole American continent—wonderful metal workers, wonderful engineers. This fist was the only gold object found by the expedition."

"And just what is the fist?" Bill gently broke in.

Joanna shook her lovely head. Her eyes were shining, clear and dark and bottomless. Her parted lips, with her eyes, gave her an air of breathless eagerness.

"People kill each other for the gold fist," Bill went on, studying that bright, beautiful face. "People lie and kidnap for the sake of it. But what's its secret?"

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"An engineering or scientific process."

"Does Chine know?"

Joanna shrugged. She had soft, slim shoulders. "Perhaps."

HE was glad that this hadn't happened about a year ago. With the appeal of her fresh young beauty, with the lure of her romance and mystery, and with her cleverness, she would have handled him as if he were so much putty.

"How did you get the fist away from the old fellow in Cerro de Pasca?"

"When I'd got there, he'd gone. He told me later that John B. Grayson's head field man had been dickering with him, but the field man was murdered. The old man was terrified and fled to Lima. I traced him there. I got it from him by promising to keep his name absolutely out of it."

"Did you buy it from him?"

"No. He was glad to get rid of it. I was to send him money when I'd sold it to Grayson. He trusted me, he said, while he wouldn't trust a man."

"He'd stolen it," Bill said, "from the expedition of 1911."

"How did you know?"

"Guessed it. That makes it anybody's fist."

"Yes," Joanna said bitterly. "It's anybody's fist. But—"

"Let's hear the rest."

"I'm telling you the truth. Once I had the fist, I knew I was in danger."

"All this," Bill said, "was happening those two nights when I knew you in Lima."

"Yes."

"Who was the man who attacked you the first night I met you?"

"I don't know. I'd been dickering with the old man who had the fist, and this—this terrible creature was following me." She shuddered. "Did you see his face?"

"It was too dark under the trees."

"He—he didn't have any nose!"

"Ah," Bill murmured. "An old friend of mine. I thought so."

"What do you mean?"

"It isn't important. Then what happened?"

"The next night, after I'd seen you the second time, I succeeded in getting the gold fist from the old man. The next morning what happened was this: I was going to send it by air express to my grandmother. Sending it by air express was the safest way I could think of to get it to New York. I had just wrapped it up. I was in my hotel room. This was the day I left the note for you at the café.

"My Chinese servant, my amah, was in my hotel room with me. She'd been my servant since I was a little girl. I was afraid my uncle and aunt had found out about this thing the same way I had."

"You mean, the Chines?"

"Yes. And he's an utterly unscrupulous rascal. I was afraid he'd follow me. He'd been doing that. I had just wrapped up the fist for expressing, when I saw them entering the hotel. I gave the package to my amah and told her to slip out the back way with it. She left. My uncle came in and threatened me."

JOANNA stopped. Her lower lip was trembling. She caught it between her teeth.

"Ever since I was small, he's had me scared to death of him. Well—he forced me to tell him what I'd done with it. That much of what I told you before is really true. He is hypnotic—and weird. But a strange and terrible

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thing had happened. My uncle found out that my amah was dead and the package was gone. The whole question then was, had she expressed it before she was killed?

"She'd been found lying in a gutter with a knife in her back. My uncle told me we were leaving for New York and that I was to hand the fist over to him when we got here. I mean, he assumed that my grandmother would have it."

"Did he make any inquiries at the air express office?"

"They refused to tell him anything. I tried to escape, and he caught me. He is absolutely ruthless. He decided that I was to be insane. It was the only way he could get me to New York under his control, so he said. And he wasn't taking any chances with me. Too much money was involved."

"Why," Bill asked, "did he turn you loose in New York?"

"I was coming to that. When we came ashore from the launch, we went directly to the Chines' apartment. It's in the Village. My uncle had me telephone my grandmother, and Nita listened in on an extension, and found that the fist had not been delivered to my grandmother."

"So," Bill said, "they thought you had double crossed them. They turned you loose and had you trailed, hoping you'd contact the party or parties who had it. Well, you did. Smart girl. Smart Mr. Chine!"

"Smart Mr. Lassiter," Joanna said. "Whoever killed my amah and stole it gave it to you."

"No one will ever know who killed her and gave it to me," Bill replied. "Had you arranged to sell the fist to Grayson?"

"Yes. What are you going to do with my gold fist?"

"Sell it to Grayson."

"Where do I come in?"

"It depends entirely on how helpful you can be. You knew about the quipu. Why didn't you have it translated?"

"There wasn't time. I think it'll take a mathematical genius to work out the details of its secret."

"I'm having that done now—not a mathematical genius but the greatest archæologist, the greatest authority on the Incas, in this country."

"Who?"

"Bruce Orwood."

He took her to Gramercy Park in a taxicab. During that ride, Joanna Trowbridge said very little. She had turned quite pale. She was obviously tense with expectancy.

When they reached the archæologist's house and Bill had paid the taxi driver, he took her arm and said, "Now, Joanna—no tricks!"

"No tricks," the girl promised.

He pressed the door button. He heard the bell ringing faintly in the depths of the house."

Joanna stood beside him, with her gloved hands tightly clasped, her eyes bright and sparkling, as she stared at the door.

Bill pressed the button again. No one came.

"He said five, and it's five after."

"Try again."

BILL tried again. He was beginning to feel uncomfortable. His old suspicions of Dr. Orwood returned. He wondered if the old man had been putting on an act. It was quite possible that even a famous archæologist, noted for his honesty, was not to be trusted with the key to a huge fortune. The gold fist seemed to turn everyone into a liar, a thief, or a murderer.

He tried the doorknob, and found

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that the door was about a half inch ajar. He opened it.

The hall was dark. The living room was in darkness.

Bill stepped in and called, "Dr. Orwood!"

There was no answer.

"Felipe!"

Silence.

"Perhaps," Bill said uneasily, "you had better wait."

"No," she whispered.

He led the way through the living room with its leering masks and crossed spears, to the heavy rich blue portières which hung over the door into the doctor's study.

As he reached the portières, Bill heard, from the study beyond, a strange sound, a scraping sound, then a soft thud.

"Doctor!" he called.

The archæologist did not answer.

Bill jerked the portières aside. The door was open.

They entered.

The study was in utter confusion, a scene of wreckage, of violence. A tornado could have visited no more damage. The two chairs were overturned. Papers and books were scattered about. And on the floor, in a heap, lay the archæologist. The handle of a knife protruded from his back, on the left side, about a third of the way down. Blood was still welling out of the wound. He had been stabbed recently.

Bill took a backward step with a grunt of horror. Behind him, Joanna said, "Oh, Bill!" in a thin, agonized wail. He looked at her with shocked eyes. He saw, beyond her, the portières hanging as motionless as if they were carved from lapis lazuli.

Joanna was white. Her eyes were sightless with terror. He looked back at the desk.

"The quipu's gone," Bill said in a gritty voice. "Whoever murdered him got it. But they didn't get the translation."

He bent down and removed some scraps of torn paper, covered with fine pencil figures, from the dead man's limp fingers.

"That was what the fight was about," Bill said. "The killer got the quipu, but he didn't get the figures."

This explanation, of course, accounted for the scraps of paper scattered like large snowflakes all about the study.

Joanna nodded, biting her lower lip. Her eyes were enormous.

Bill's emotions were a mixture of relief and bitter sorrow—relief because the professor's laborious translation of the quipu had been saved from the murderer, sorrow at the old man's death.

He jerked his head toward the sprawled body. He said hoarsely, "My God, Joanna — I'm responsible for this—"

"No," she said. "No, you're not. It's the fourth death. Everywhere that fist goes—murder follows."

A movement beyond her startled him.

The portières, so motionless a moment ago, had stirred as if some one had moved rapidly past them on silent feet.

BILL ran past the girl and looked into the living room. Ghastly grinning masks stared back at him from the walls. He ran to the front door. He had left it open. It was now closed.

He opened it and ran down the steps. He saw no one. Then, a half block away, he saw a familiar figure. It was that of a tall and slender man. There was something of elegance in the

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stride, something of a military nicety in the set of the shoulders that convinced Bill he was not mistaken.

"Amador!" he shouted.

The figure did not pause. Bill started down the street after him at a run. The man ahead turned a corner. When Bill reached it, the Bolivian—if it had been the Bolivian—was gone.

He returned to the house. Joanna was waiting for him on the doorstep. She was still white, but she was no longer terrified.

"You should not have left it with him," she said. "You should have stayed. I think I know who has the quipu. Give me the fist. I promise you, you'll be suitably rewarded."

Bill took her by the arm.

"This place isn't safe," he said. "If we're seen here, we're sure to be locked up later and third-degreed."

Safely around the corner, he said, "No, Joanna. You can't have the fist. I know who has the quipu. And when I've sold the fist and the quipu, I'll promise you won't be left out in the cold."

Joanna was breathing quickly with anger. Her eyes blazed with it. Her face was white with it.

"Bill," she said, panting, "if you keep that fist, you're little more than a thief."

"We're all thieves," Bill mentioned.

"You don't need it," Joanna persisted. "I do. You're a man. If you're broke, it isn't so bad. But what about me? What about my grandmother? I've got to have money, Bill. I've been offered a hundred thousand dollars for it, Bill. I need it desperately. Be a darling. Give me the fist."

"Broke?" Bill repeated. "You carry a cigarette case worth a thousand. Your platinum wrist watch is lousy with diamonds, darling. That ruby and diamond bracelet is worth five thousand alone. You mean, you're down to your last million!"

"It's nothing but front, Bill," Joanna said steadily. "These things are all I have left. I can't cash in on them for much. We're losing our house. I'm telling you the truth. We're broke; we're cleaned out. We'll be out on the sidewalk in less than a week. I'm not lying, Bill."

Bill knew she was not lying. He was sorry for her. He loved her.

"LISTEN," Bill said. "Let's be sensible. You've been offered a hundred thousand for this fist. It's a hundred-thousand-dollar fist to you, but it's a fifteen-million-dollar fist to me. If I can get back the quipu and have it translated by midnight, I can sell the fist for a hundred thousand—and win that bet. I've got to do it, Joanna. Help me—and I'll gladly pay you a hundred thousand tomorrow, if I win the bet."

"No," Joanna said. "A man who would make a bet like that is no business man. I need a hundred thousand dollars worse than you need fifteen million. Give me that fist!"

"No."

"All right," she snapped. "Then it's war! And no quarter!"

Joanna grabbed for his pocket. Bill wrapped his fingers about her wrist. He saw a policeman coming down the sidewalk.

"I'll get that fist," Joanna said savagely, "if it's my last living act!—Officer!" she screamed. "This man just robbed—"

Bill had a hundred-yard start. It was well that he had. He was in fine condition, and he could run; but the policeman was in fine condition, too, and he could run quite as fast.

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Bill reached the subway kiosk with the same hundred-yard advantage he had started with. He went down the stairs four at a bound. A train was just leaving the platform. The doors were, of course, closed.

Bill vaulted the turnstile and ran to the end of the platform. He grabbed at a steel rail on the side of the last car. It almost yanked his arm out; at least, that was the sensation. But he hung on. The train roared into the tunnel.

At Twenty-third Street he joined the crowds leaving the station. He took a taxicab home.

It was a little after five-thirty when he reached his penthouse. Less than six and a half hours to midnight! Less than six and a half hours in which to regain the quipu, to solve the mystery of the gold fist, to sell it to John Grayson! Less than six and a half hours in which to win his $15,000,000 bet!

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE AIRPORT.

WHEN Homer Lassiter left the Fifth Avenue bus, he was not only rattled; he was afraid of faces. The thought that he might see another man with an invisible face drop dead was too much for him. He had a sudden frantic desire to get away from crowds. He wanted to get out into the open country. He wanted to be away from faces, to be alone. He wanted to walk where he would not see faces.

With his new power of vision, or whatever it was—and whatever it was, it was a malediction—Homer felt as any normal man must feel who has suddenly acquired an unnatural talent. He plunged downstairs into a subway.

He never knew, later, quite how he reached Newark, New Jersey. Or how he got from Newark to the airport. It was almost as if he had been drawn there by some power beyond his control.

There was a great deal of activity at the airport. The fog had delayed planes for all parts of the country. Many were now warming up, preparing to resume their schedules. None were coming in, but many were taking off. Homer stood at a rail and looked at a large shining monoplane preparing to leave.

The passengers were going aboard. And as he saw their faces—their blank faces—horror gripped Homer. It was so much worse than either of his two previous experiences that Homer went faint and ill. He clung to the rail so that he would not collapse. He squeezed his eyes shut again and again—and stared at the people who were going aboard the big plane.

But each time he looked the results were the same.

None of them had faces!

The cabin door slammed. Chocks were removed from the big wheels. Just as the twin engines roared, Homer shouted, "Don't let that plane go! They're all going to be killed!"

Some one said, "What's the matter with that guy?"

Homer screamed, "Stop that plane! Don't let it go! They're going to die! They haven't got any faces!"

In his panic, he vaulted the fence and started toward the plane, which was now moving. Blasts of air from the propeller on his side struck him and almost knocked him down. But he reached up and banged on a door, yelling, "Stop! Stop!"

Then the propeller blast knocked him down. The plane moved on, its air

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blast rolling him over, scattering dust and dirt upon him.

Some one shouted, "Grab that guy! He's nuts!"

He scrambled to his feet. A man had him by the arm. He looked like an official. He was in uniform.

"That plane," Homer babbled, "is never going to reach its destination! Everybody's going to be killed! You are murdering those passengers! I can't see their faces, and they're going to die!"

"Sure," the brown-faced man said. "Come along with me and we'll have a long talk about it."

Homer wasn't too frantic to know that he was being humored. He angrily struck at the man's handsome, brown face. The man struck back. Homer broke free and ran. He vaulted the fence and ran as fast as he could.

Behind him people were yelling.

And so it was that Homer Lassiter became of concern to the police.

"Calling all cars. Attention all cars. A man thought to be demented, wandering about Newark. Last seen in the vicinity of Newark Airport. May be headed for New York. Here's his description:

"An American, about thirty-five years old; about five feet eight inches tall; wearing a light gray suit and a dark gray hat, with a black band. He may be armed."

HOMER emerged from the Twenty-third Street kiosk of the Hudson tube. Two policemen were waiting for him. One of them said:

"You just came from Newark Airport, didn't you?"

"Yes. Let me go!"

"I guess this is the guy, Mike. Hold him while I send for the pathological bus."

The pathological bus presently came and took Homer to Bellevue, where a cynical young man asked cynical questions.

"What's the matter with this man?"

"He's crazy, doc," one of the arresting officers answered.

"What makes you think he's any crazier than you are?"

"Well, doc, if I begin seein' people without any faces, I'd come here without any invitation."

The young doctor questioned Homer gently. Homer tried to explain, and the harder he tried to explain, the more gentle the young doctor became, and the more rattled Homer became. He knew he was giving a perfect imitation of an insane man. He tried to be coherent, but he was too rattled.

He was passed along to an older doctor, who questioned him. He was soothing and calming, too, and he did not try to humor Homer. He treated him as if he really thought there might be something in what Homer was saying; that he had seen two men with invisible faces drop dead in different parts of New York, and had assumed, when he saw every passenger on that plane with an invisible face, that they were being threatened with disaster.

Another doctor arrived. He said to Homer, "Try to describe it from the beginning, please."

"I don't have to try," Homer answered. "You honestly don't have to be so indulgent with me. I'm only rattled, not insane. So would you be."

"I agree with you," the new doctor said, "but you must admit that your experience has been a trifle abnormal."

"That's what made me so frantic!"

"Of course. And we want to help

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you. We must get at the root of it. Have you suffered any particular emotional shocks recently?"

"Good Lord," said Homer, "you still think it's a mental aberration. Don't you realize that it's simply a peculiarity of vision that I've suddenly been cursed with?"

"How can we grant that," the doctor asked, "until we make sure it isn't a mental aberration?"

"Why don't you test my sanity?"

"Very well, Mr. Lassiter. Who is the President of the United States?"

"Franklin Delano Roosevelt."

"And who was President before him?"

"Herbert Hoover."

"And before him?"

"Coolidge. And before him Harding, and before him Wilson, and before him Taft, and before him Theodore Roosevelt.

"Do you want me to go back to Washington?"

"No, Mr. Lassiter. Try to calm yourself."

"Damn it to hell," the little man shouted, "I am calm!"

"Have you a grudge against anyone in particular?"

"The politics of the present administration—"

"Never mind that. Are you worried about anything in particular?"

"What do you think, doctor?"

"You're worried about nothing except this trick you have of seeing blank faces?"

"That's all."

"Are you wealthy, Mr. Lassiter? Are you worth millions?"

"No. I have no delusions of grandeur, if that's what you're driving at."

"You hear voices, of course, some of the times."

"I do," Homer said spiritedly, "when people are talking."

"Do you ever hear God talking to you?"

"Never."

"But don't you sometimes write messages to people, with God guiding your hand?"

"Never," Homer snapped.

He was growing exasperated.

"Kindly repeat after me: Sister Susy's sewing six thousand six hundred and sixty-six socks for six thousand six hundred and sixty-six sea-sick soldiers."

"All one-legged soldiers?" Homer chuckled bitterly. "All right, gentlemen. Sister Susy's sewing six thousand six hundred and sixty-six socks for six thousand six hundred and sixty-six sea-sick soldiers."

THE doctor seemed to be in something of a quandary.

"Try him on the Schilder test," one of the younger doctors suggested.

Dr. Arundel looked at Homer more hopefully.

"Do you think you are handsome?" he asked.

"Certainly not. I am a homely, freckle-faced runt, and when any woman stares at me it is a case of mistaken identity."

"Do you believe you are healthy, efficient and superior?"

Homer was growing more and more impatient.

"I know I am healthy. I am seldom efficient, and I never worry about whether I am superior or inferior."

"Would you like to beat up your bigger companions? In other words, do you consider yourself aggressive?"

"In a moment," Homer answered, "I am going to start beating up a lot of doctors who can't recognize the dif-

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ference between sanity and insanity. Does that answer the question?"

"Do you often have these homicidal impulses?" one of the doctors asked.

Homer said wearily, "Gentlemen, for Heaven's sake—"

"Just a moment," Dr. Arundel interrupted. "There are just a few more questions. What is your attitude toward sex and love?"

"My—" Homer began, and gulped. His freckles were lost in the successive tides of angry crimson. He was trying to be calm. He was repeating to himself that these men in white were merely trying to be helpful.

"I can take it or leave it alone," he said.

It was evident that his natural, if somewhat bellicose, answers puzzled the doctors.

One of them asked him, "How much money each month would make you happy?"

Another said, "Are you afraid of death?"

And Homer answered, "A thousand a month. And only when I see it happen to others. Now what?"

"Will you sit in this chair, please?"

Homer sat in the chair. They tested his reflexes, which appeared to be normal. They asked him questions. His case evidently interested or amused the doctors, for they called in other doctors, all of whom listened to Homer's strange account of his phenomenal new talent. They all asked him questions. At the end of two or three hours of this, another man in white came in. He was a newcomer. He carried a pink newspaper in his hands.

He did not glance at Homer. He joined the crowd about Homer and said:

"A Sovereign Airlines plane just cracked up on the outskirts of Philadelphia. Why the hell do they let them fly in weather like this?"

Dr. Arundel barked, "Let me have that paper."

He almost snatched it out of the other's hands. He ran his eyes swiftly over it.

He said, in a shocked voice, "Mr. Lassiter, tell us again just what you saw at the Newark Airport."

"I told you what I saw," Homer said irritably. The long inquisition had worn him out. "The passengers of that plane didn't have any faces. They were just blurs."

"Think carefully," Dr. Arundel said. "Did they all look like that?"

"Yes. No! No. The girl in uniform, the stewardess—she didn't have a blank face. I remember that distinctly."

"Well, gentlemen?" Dr. Arundel said rather wearily to the circle of silent doctors.

And he showed them the front page of the paper, where, under the headline, it was stated, in plain black type, that Mary Bulger, stewardess, was sole survivor of the crash.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Peaceful Explosives

TNT was used in the dyeing industry for years before any one knew it would explode.

A solution of nitroglycerin in alcohol, about one per cent strong, is used to treat asthma. —*J. W. Holden.*

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Snake Eyes

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

The fight between Doc Cook, the Polar bear, and Lena, the ostrich, was fun while it lasted—but not for Ed Durkee, the referee

GET me straight, I am not a sucker for fortune-telling. In my time around carnival lots I have saw too much of the profession to ever become a steady customer. They are ninety-nine percent salami, and I still say so. As to the powers of Princess Petronella Flannigan I will only state facts. If they sound like a plug for Petronella, she has got that much coming.

Understand, I and the Princess had just run together by accident on Broadway and dropped into Rooney's to get out of traffic. We sit there bending the elbow and fanning about old times for maybe an hour, and then Petronella's eyes kind of sharpen all of a sudden and she grabs up my duke.

"Let me see that palm a minute, Mr. Durkee," she says. "My goodness! I don't know *when* I've seen so much bad news lined up in any one hand!"

Then she dished it.

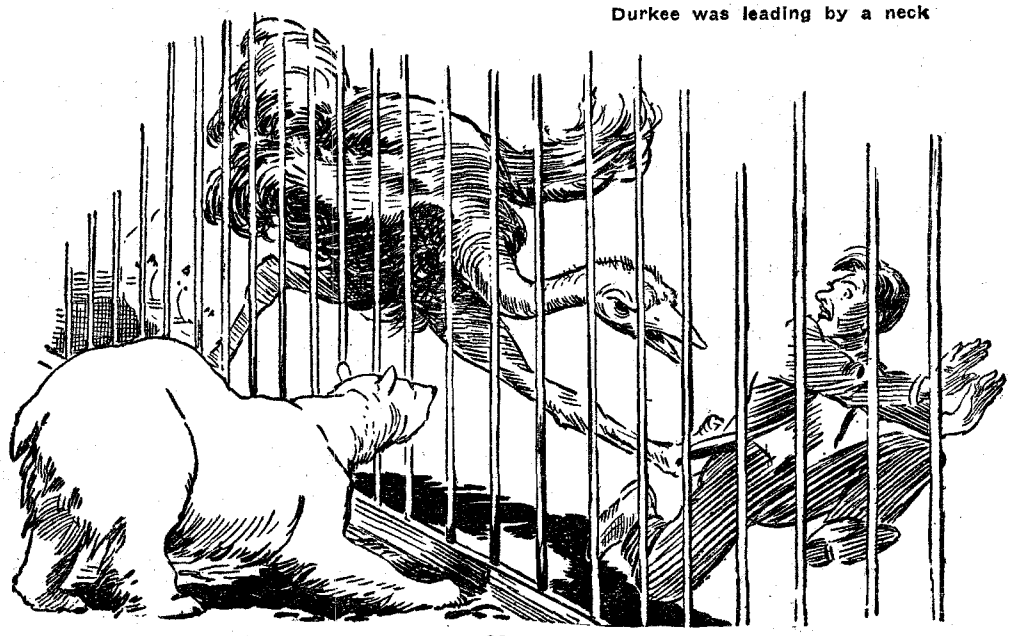
"I see," says Princess Petronella Flannigan, "a lot of grief coming your way. I see reunion with a long-absent friend, in which the bitter will be mixed with the sweet. I see, beyond this, but not far beyond, a place where bars of iron meet the eye on every side. And, alas, Mr. Durkee, I see *you* in that place, desperately seeking some way out."

All I have wished since is that the seeress could of told me more, but that had to be where she stopped.

"Unfortunately," she says, "I can read no further. The human hand, as I have often remarked, is like a street car. When you come to the end of the line there is nothing to do but get off."

Believe it or not, I am no capper for Princess Flannigan. Myself, I have filled in nothing. So help me, I had the warning that rainy afternoon in Rooney's, and it came straight through what Petronella

Durkee was leading by a neck



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calls "the veil." You'll never convince me different. Just listen.

We'll say it was around 4 P.M. when I got the wire that trouble was moving in my direction. Well, the way it doped out later, the train with Smithers on it must of been just about whistling through Yonkers then.

Anyhow, when I went home a little after five he had had time enough to dig up my address and there he was.

I knew it no sooner than I opened the rooming-house door, the hall being filled with a noise of bleating like there was a flock of sheep pastured upstairs.

"It's your company," the landlady says, looking at me hard, "and I'll thank you to do something about him. My arm's sore from pounding on the ceiling for him to pipe down."

The company was Smithers, of course—old Saxophone Smithers, America's Number One chiseler, in person. It had been more than a year since I last laid eyes on him, the two of us leaving Sombrero, Texas, in opposite directions to make it a little harder for the sheriff. But Smithers hadn't changed none.

His whiskers was just as white and just as fluffy and it was the same old dented B-flat sax he had been passing away the time with.

"I observe, Edward," says he, "that you live among music lovers. Their applause has been most stimulating. If you'll pardon me, I shall render one last encore."

"Skip it," I says. "Tell me about tricks instead. What jail you been in?"

Smithers give a light laugh.

"Tut!" says he. "What I have been in is politics, Edward. In fact, I *am* in politics. I dare say you've heard of Bott City, fairest of the lesser municipalities of our Empire State? That is my present headquarters. By a strange quirk of fortune, I hold office as assistant to the mayor of Bott City."

And that was exactly what it said on the card that Smithers flipped out to me.

"Love o' Mike!" says I. "Who's the mayor? Anybody I know?"

"You don't know him yet," says Smithers. "His name is Milgrim—J. Wallsworth Milgrim—and he is a man wealthy in his own right. Almost vulgarly wealthy. In brief, he is none other than the Milgrim of Milgrim's Munchies, widely advertised as 'The Toffee Table-d'Hote.' And the manufacture of Munchies, I may say, is Bott City's leading industry."

Smithers opened a swell new pigskin bag that was sitting alongside the saxophone case.

"If you have the glasses, Edward," he says, "I have the bottle." And over the drinks he continues: "To enlighten you further, J. Wallsworth Milgrim is, like myself, a newcomer in the political arena. In truth, he was just embarking on his mayoralty race when I made his acquaintance in a Pullman smoker, shortly after my hasty departure from Texas.

"At the moment I was casting about for clients who might be interested in valuable advance information on horse-racing results, which I was prepared to offer a few discreet and moneyed parties. But to a man of vision it was evident that infinitely greater possibilities might be opened by cultivating Mr. Milgrim along other lines.

"So when the train reached Bott City I alighted with him. I put aside all other interests to aid in his campaign, and after he had been swept gloriously into office I remained as his executive assistant in City Hall. The salary is nominal. But I cannot complain, Edward. There have been really splendid pickings. Indeed, I have often felt that I wasted a great part of my life by not dedicating myself to public service much much earlier."

SMITHERS tilted the bottle again and dried his whiskers with a silk handkerchief that was a rich royal purple matching his tie and socks.

"It has been a pleasure," he beams, "to be associated with J. Wallsworth Milgrim. He's a remarkable man, Edward, and a still more remarkable mayor. Not a taker but a giver. At his own expense he has equipped Bott City with new fire apparatus

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throughout. Our police have new uniforms modeled after the dress regalia of the Seventh Regiment—paid for out of Mayor Milgrim's private purse. Just now I am directing the expenditure of many thousands at Milgrim Park, which we hope to make one of the world's outstanding pleasure spots. And—ah—our park project brings to mind a question. I dare say, Durkee, that you haven't disposed of Alonzo?"

I give Smithers a hard look, and why shouldn't I? Alonzo was one of my big mistakes. He was an eighteen-foot boa constrictor I had took in on a debt when the Burns & McGuire Consolidated Carnival Attractions collapsed on the Kansas pampas some summers before. I had figured I could find a way of turning him into cash—and not only I but a lot of others including Smithers knew very well I had figured wrong.

"Why bring that up?" I says. "Yes, I've still got Alonzo. Boa constrictors are a drug on the market."

Smithers grinned way back in his alfalfa.

"Not necessarily," he says, rubbing his hands. "Where, by the way, is Alonzo now? Here with you?"

"The landlady," I says, "is narrow minded. So I'm boarding him on a snake farm down in south Jersey. Why?"

"I am prompted," replies Smithers, "by no idle curiosity. The fact is we are establishing a zoo in Milgrim Park, and already it has been possible for me to do a good turn for one friend of the old days. Through my suggestion Felix MacNair, whom you probably remember, has become superintendent of the Milgrim Park Zoo."

"MacNair?" I says. "That little rummy that used to be bull boss with the Dix Brothers' show? Why, I thought he was raising ostriches."

"Correct," nods Smithers. "But croup spread among his birds and carried off all but one. The survivor, a female named Lena and an extremely hardy specimen, is now on exhibition in Milgrim Park. However, Durkee, that is aside from the mark. Reverting to Alonzo, I believe I can arrange to take him off your hands—and at a price beyond your fondest dreams—if you will run up to Bott City with me."

Well, hindsight is a great thing. I certainly should of thought of them recent solemn words of Princess Petronella Flannigan's. I should of noticed the queer way that Saxophone Smithers kept looking down his nose while he explained that I could make a lot better dicker with Mayor Milgrim if I was to meet his honor socially first off.

But I fell. I shot a wire to the snake farm telling them to crate Alonzo and express him to Bott City. And that same night I rattled happily along with Smithers to the slaughter.

IRREGARDLESS of his advanced age, Saxophone Smithers leans very much to fancy dress and he had certainly put his mark on Bott City. The burg itself could have stood a lot of dressing up, but the cops was rigged out as magnificent as Roxy ushers. Street-cleaners wore sky-blue britches and riding boots and red coats with gold piping.

And out at Milgrim Park, which Smithers insisted on showing off before breakfast, the zoo-keepers could of stepped into a circus parade anywheres without changing their duds.

Although it was past 9 A.M., Felix MacNair was not around.

"Mac," Smithers remarks, "is a late riser."

"Yeah," I says. "He used to be as much as a week late sometimes. That's why Dix Brothers let him out."

Smithers glanced down his nose, and that time I caught it. I could read him. Plain enough, Mr. MacNair had been performing on the musical glasses again around Bott City.

"But we get along handsomely, Mac and I," says Smithers. "I wouldn't have a stranger on his job for the world. We—er—coöperate, you see."

Then he pointed and got off the subject of Felix MacNair. "Ah," he says. "There's Lena!"

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It was a hot summer day, and practically all the inmates of Milgrim Park Zoo was outdoors. Lena, the last of the McNair ostriches, was in a cage just ahead of us. Like most of the other animals, she looked kind of scraggy, but she was right there with the old pep.

She was all over her coop, stepping proud and high.

Practically all the cat exhibits was taking their siesta, and in the cage next to Lena's a sweaty Polar bear was trying to get away from the sun behind some rocks. From the way Lena looked at the bear and the bear looked at Lena, I could guess that they was not exactly bosom pals.

"Lena," says Smithers, "is something of a tease. Just watch her now."

The ostrich had swung around, throwing her stern to the neighbor from the frozen north. She begun to scratch with one of them massive claws, and a stream of pebbles went flying out behind her like machine gun bullets.

For a minute they rattled all around the bear. Then Lena got his range, and fetched him one on the mush with a chunk of concrete as big as a brick.

"Doc Cook," observes Smithers, meaning the bear, "is good-natured. But he does often lose patience with Lena."

The smack had kind of dazed Doc Cook. He got up and stood rocking. After a minute he waddled over to the iron picket fence between him and Lena and told her some pretty harsh things in bear language.

"If that bear ever gets through that fence," I says, "you will need a new ostrich."

Smithers cackled.

"You think so, Edward? Well, my own money would be on Lena. She can handle herself."

Lena was handling herself right then. She come over and give old Doc Cook a leer, as much as to crack, "Sez you!"

"Sez me!" grunts the bear, and at that Lena swung around and let go with a foot. It caught Doc Cook in what might have been the solar plexus. Talk about power! He weighed all of half a ton, but that kick lifted him clean off the ground. He came down sitting, and stayed down.

On a clean-cut decision, the round was Lena's.

A COUPLE of them fancy-dress keepers had been standing a short way below, but I noticed them dust when the altercation started.

"Fine pair of animal men," I says, and again I caught a hint of trouble on Smither's mossy pan.

"They are not animal men," he admits. "Until a few weeks ago all the attendants here were gardeners. Felix MacNair is the only real animal man connected with Milgrim Park Zoo." He stood smoothing his whiskers and looking at me funny. "By the way, Edward," he says, "I've given Mayor Milgrim to understand that you are MacNair's cousin. You'll want to keep that in mind when you meet him."

I asked him why he should have been telling around any slander like that, and he answers: "It was part of the missionary work I've done on his honor in paving the way for the sale of Alonzo. He has a weakness for glamorous personalities and, believe me, I've made one out of you. J. W. thinks you are probably the best-informed and highest-priced authority on animals in the U. S. A. Ah, you'll see that the propaganda helps, Edward. It will not only make it easier to do business with our mayor, but will enable you to drive a much better bargain."

Just then a big limousine pulled up in a driveway behind Lena's cage and a stout party in a cutaway coat squeezed out.

"The mayor!" whispers Smithers. "You play the strong and silent rôle, and leave the lead to me."

Deep down, I had been feeling kind of sorry for J. Wallsworth Milgrim. He had sounded like too good a guy to be in the clutches of a heartless old trimmer like Saxophone Smithers, who would think nothing at all about knocking down on his own grandmother. But one look at J. Wallsworth cured me.

You could see by the way he walked that

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he was mighty well pleased with himself. He had frog eyes and a fat, mean face as round and hard as a cartwheel dollar, and I knew before he dropped me that flabby fin of his that I had Mayor Milgrim's number.

He might be a spender, all right enough, but he would only be spending because he liked to see his name on things. Also, I would of bet at that minute—and won, too—that every dollar he was lavishing elsewhere around Bott City was scrooged out of the pay envelopes of them hundreds of pale-looking gals I had saw pouring into the Munchie factory that A.M.

"Durkee?" wheezes J. Wallsworth Milgrim. "Been hearing about how you break the resistance of the big cats before Clyde Beatty gets 'em. Glad meetcha, I'm sure. And what do you think about Milgrim Park Zoo now you've seen it?"

That was how Smithers had laid the propaganda on. Thick.

I never blinked.

"Nice plant," I says. "But it might be that you are just a little shy in the reptile wing. With the boa constrictor in you'll be okay, though."

His honor shot me a stare.

"What boa constrictor?"

"We won't take up your time now, Mr. Mayor," Saxophone Smithers puts in, fast. "Durkee'll be with us for some days, of course. And later on—"

"Yes, later," snaps J. Wallsworth. He fixed his pale-blue frog eyes on me like I was a fly making ready to light. "What do you hear from MacNair? Got any idea when he'll be back?"

Smithers chipped in again.

"Probably," he says, "by the end of the week. There was a letter from him at the hotel when Durkee and I arrived this morning. His sister's condition is much improved.

"You may depend on it, he will return to his duties as soon as he knows her to be out of danger."

"Very well," says Mayor Milgrim. "If it had been whisky again, there'd have been no need for MacNair to return. As it is, we'll just dock him for the time he's away. Durkee's presence saves the situation."

WITHOUT as much as a nod, his honor trooped off in the direction of the monkey house, one end of which was occupied by an office labeled "Bott City Park Commission."

"Hey!" I says, sharp, to Saxophone Smithers. "What is this save-the-situation stuff?"

The old conniver fumbled at his silky Dundrearies.

"Why—ah—the fact is, Edward," he replies, "that Felix MacNair is temporarily among the missing. It's the old trouble, I suspect. But certainly within a week he'll sober up and appear bright and shining. Meanwhile, of course, J. W. is a bit concerned for the welfare of the zoo stock. You must realize he has made a considerable investment here. Yes, very considerable."

Then at last the whole horrid truth about Saxophone Smithers' trip to N. Y. was coming out. As long as MacNair stayed in charge, Milgrim Park Zoo was one grand little gold mine for Smithers. Him and Felix wasn't allowed to do any actual buying, but they could recommend, and they would only recommend purchases where there was a heavy kick-back promised.

Well, MacNair had to dip his bill in the red-eye every so often, and he had already done it one time too many when he started on this latest binge.

"I could cover him for a couple of days," says Smithers, "but no longer. Then I informed J. W. that Felix had been called away by sickness in the family. At the same time I intimated that you, not only being related to MacNair but still more gifted with animals than Felix himself, would pinch-hit at Milgrim Park Zoo. I knew you'd never fail me."

I cast an eye on Lena, who seemed to be getting set to drop another rock barrage on poor Doc Cook next door.

"Maybe," I says coldly, "I never failed you yet. But there is always a first occasion, Smithers, and that occasion has come. I do not intend to get any closer to your

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animal collection than I am at present. You have played me low-down for the last time. Why, you feathery old two-timer, you ain't even mentioned Alonzo to this jape Milgrim. You lured me here on false pretences."

Smithers gazed at me steady and sorrowful.

"On my word, Edward," he says, "you do me an injustice. I will not deny that I have grasped an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone. I grant that in protecting MacNair's job, I protect valuable perquisites for myself. But for you, in so doing, I establish a contact with our millionaire mayor which will prove invaluable when we come to the point of acquiring Alonzo for Bott City. Stop and think."

I hand it to Smithers. Talking speedy, he made it all look reasonable. All I would have to do, he guarantees, is stall around until Felix MacNair give up his current attempt to outbox John Barleycorn, which I knew from long previous acquaintance with Felix would be somewheres about a week from the day he put on the gloves.

Well, there I was in Bott City. It was too late to cancel shipping orders on Alonzo and after all I might wind up by lifting a piece of change off of J. Wallsworth Milgrim.

With iron bars all around, exactly as Princess Petronella Flannigan had saw pictured in my palm not twenty-four hours before, I blindly let Saxophone Smithers run in his harpoon.

When J. Wallsworth stopped and frogged at me while puffing back to the limousine, I was sunk.

"Don't worry, Mr. Mayor," I says. "Even if it should be that Cousin Lulu has a whole row of relapses, I'll stand by until good old Felix is with you again."

"He ought to be grateful," clips out Mr. Milgrim. Then he thaws a little. "Before you leave town, Durkee," he says, "I'd like to have you relate some of your more exciting experiences to our local newspaper boys.

"We might have our pictures snapped side by side on City Hall steps to run with the interview."

"I never give interviews," says I. "But we'll get together. Absolutely."

AT the jump, it did not look as though there was likely to be any real hardship connected with acting as stand-in for Bott City's skidding zoo boss. MacNair had drilled his amateur assistants in the care and feeding of the Milgrim Park exhibits. They knew the what and how and when, and all they actually needed was the idea of somebody behind 'em in case of emergency. I figured that if Felix hadn't extended his drinking periods over the old days all would be well.

Saxophone Smithers had tipped me off as the ace animal trainer of all time, and I could see it was sort of generally expected that I would step in among the big cats when the notion struck me and run them through their paces. I even hinted to some of the lads that I might. Yeah, I done a little talking. Maybe too much.

Alonzo arrived one day behind I and Smithers, traveling in a piano crate. I had him trucked to Milgrim Park and let him out for an airing that night after visiting hours at the zoo. He was one happy boa constrictor, tickled pink to see me after all the months among strangers at the snake farm, and he even seemed to remember Smithers.

At that, I had always liked Alonzo. He is one reptile, I can say, without a mean coil in his body. Like most big snakes he is quite partial to rabbits, but he can take them or leave them alone. What he is really mad about is cheese, in particular the high-powered numbers. I never forgot his passion when I went to see him in Jersey and he was no sooner out of his pianoforte Pullman there in Bott City than he was frisking my pockets in hopes of discovering some ripe morsel.

It made a great show for my staff of keepers. After I had slapped Alonzo down and sent him slithering back into the box in pursuit of a ball of Camembert, I knew my stock would not need any further boosting around Milgrim Park for a considerable spell.

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Of course when you know Alonzo there is nothing to him. He is old and feeble. Although billed by his former owner as Alonzo the Man-Crusher, he has gone down hill so far from his prime that nowadays he could not as much as squeeze a lemon. But that don't show. He is as big as a beer keg around the hips, and with his eighteen-foot wheelbase and burning black eyes he is nothing that a stranger would care to meet up a dark alley.

On account of the demonstration with Alonzo coming off so good I felt better. After dinner with Smithers at the Bott-Plaza I learned there was a night club in Bott City, and I holed in at the joint until 4 A.M. I had counted on sleeping till noon, which Smithers had said would be oke, but about ten bells my telephone went crazy. Smithers was on the wire and there was hell to pay at Milgrim Park.

"For Pete's sake," says Smithers, "get out here quick and do something about your snake. He's escaped. You know that little door in the crate? Well, a moment ago Alonzo zipped through it and off into the shrubbery. And right now there's a panic on in Milgrim Park."

"Yeah?" I says. "And how did the little door in the crate get unhooked?"

"I unhooked it," says Smithers. "The mayor and I were driving through the park, and I seized what seemed to be the psychological moment to show him Alonzo. It was amazing. The instant I raised the grating, Alonzo was out like a flash. Out and gone."

I DRESSED and grabbed a taxi, stopping at a delicatessen on the way to load up with Liederkranz for a decoy.

Panic was right. Milgrim Park was full of police cars running wild, all of them jammed with Beaux Arts reserves and bristling with riot guns. Coming up to the zoo I met a regular refugee train of dames and baby buggies, flying hell-bent out of the danger zone.

Smithers was down by the monkey house and where his face was exposed it was as white as his whiskers.

"Courage, Edward!" he chokes out. "You're the man of the hour!"

"Nuts," says I. "Which way did Alonzo go?"

One of the ex-gardeners run up and shoved something in my hand. I looked, and it was a baseball bat.

Smithers grabbed me by the arm.

"Never mind Alonzo. Get up there and do something about Doc Cook and Lena first!"

Just then I heard roars and loud bangs behind all the shouting, and I knew what was happening. Felix MacNair's outrageous ostrich must of started shelling that bear again in the midst of the excitement over Alonzo's getaway, and her and bruin was now mixing it for fair.

I could see Mayor J. Wallsworth Milgrim huddling with a bunch of cops near the battleground. At the same second his honor saw me.

"Durkee!" he bellows. "Hurry, hurry!"

I could of used a good line of retreat, but there wasn't any. Too many cops.

"Don't weaken, Edward," says Smithers. "Chin up! Carry on!"

Up to and including this time, I was in my right mind. I wasn't intending to enter any cage with Doc Cook and I certainly wasn't going to intrude on Lena. But I was on the spot to make some kind of a pass at halting hostilities, and unfortunately that could not be done by remote control from behind the monkey house. I give Smithers one withering look and passed on to the fringes of the fray.

If Lena had scored her solar plexus kick before I got there it would of been plenty all right with me. But this was another day. She didn't. The weather had cooled and the little chill in the air gave Doc Cook more verve. He could take it better.

The banging I heard was him busting into the fence, but he had give up the idea of breaking it down and was wrestling the pickets apart while Lena kicked him vigorously in the slats.

Also he was getting results. He pulled one of those iron stakes out and bent another so far back that he could get a whole

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shoulder through. It looked as though another minute would see him in with Lena; and tough as she is, I could not figure Lena giving away a thousand pounds of weight and finishing in the money.

"Stop them, Durkee!" Mayor Milgrim hollers. "Take your club to 'em! Teach 'em a lesson!"

I was still hanging onto my Liederkranz and it sort of distracted Lena when she caught a whiff of it on the breeze. She pulled back a punt in midair and her Adam's apple begun fluttering like she had swallowed a squirrel.

Myself, I was not passing any kind of a break.

"Like it, Lena?" I calls to her. "Come and get it."

DAMN if she didn't. She give Doc Cook one last boot through the dismembered fence and come over on tiptoe to the front of her cage. The cheese done the same thing to her eyes that it always done to Alonzo's. They got soft and sort of yearning.

It would have been all over from then on, only the *fromage* worked on Doc Cook in an entirely different way. He let out a stricken woof and smacked the fence in a final terrific power drive that done the business. When he scrambled up he was in Lena's territory. He went at her hunched like a wrestler.

Mayor Milgrim give a hollow groan.

"Thirty-five hundred going up in smoke! Open that gate, somebody! Get in there, Durkee, and separate 'em!"

Smithers had moved up to ringside position and was right behind me.

"We're all with you, Edward," he says. "Proceed."

A haze closed in around me. I had a dim notion of keys jingling. Then there was two bangs and a click. That gate had opened and closed and been locked again. Somebody had shoved me. I was on the inside with Lena and her bear.

Doc Cook came to a full stop. He looked me over and after brief reflection shrugged me off. You could see how his mind worked. His first business was still with Lena. I would keep.

He got rolling again, and Lena just stood there as though fascinated by that gorgeous aroma off Alonzo's Liederkranz. With Doc Cook bearing down, she kept her rumble-deck aimed his way until I could practically hear the beat of angel wings over her.

No sir. She never give Doc Cook a tumble until he was up off terra firma in the jump that was to be her finish.

"Get into it, Durkee!" squawks Mayor Milgrim, dancing outside the fence. "Turn him back!"

But it wasn't me that turned that leaping Polar bear back. It was Lena.

Handle herself? Say, that bird of MacNair's was a born ring general. She knew all along what was coming up behind her; and had just waited for the right opening.

The way Doc Cook had been raised to work, he figured on giving the incident a movie finish, one great big bear-hug and fade-out. Descending on Lena's tail he had spread his arms to fold her in—and did she go through?

Pow!

Doc Cook stayed in the air but reversed his field. He made one full pinwheel, whooping all the way around, and lighted on the small of his back.

To give him credit, he was game enough. He got up—and *Zam!* No more was he on his pins than Lena nailed him. After that it was a massacre. Up and down and up and down.

If I had been in Kid Cook's corner I would have threw in the towel after that first fall and stopped the punishment. But the corner I was in was all Edward Durkee's. I was goose-flesh from scalp to ankles with a horrid feeling that this was just a prelim bout now being witnessed and that the main event of the card would be Winner vs. Durkee unless I could manage to get past the fence. It was written all over Lena whenever she looked my way. I was next.

I didn't read her wrong, either.

In another minute Doc Cook was crawling for the gap in the fence, heading home.

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Lena went right along with him, letting him have the rest of it. At the fence she clipped him a sweetheart. Doc Cook was only half way through when she connected, but he made the ten yards to his rock pile in one long bounce.

LENA hesitated at the fence. She looked after Doc Cook as he slunk in among the rocks and then with no notice whatever she whirled and come at me like a streak of feathered lightning.

There was no way out. The exit gate was locked behind me and the cage was closed on top.

Whether I liked it or not another few seconds was going to tell whether she was the better man or I was the better bird.

Mayor Milgrim was a big help, too. He yipped:

"Careful with that club, Durkee! I'll tolerate no brutality!"

Well, it was only a boy's size bat, anyhow, and worse than that it was cracked close to the taping. The first clout with it would of been the last.

"Okay," I says. "I'll tire her out."

Well, the bear and me was two different propositions and Lena found it out. I might not of been as strong as Doc Cook, but I was a whole lot nimbler and all I had to pin my future to was fancy footwork.

On her side Lena had plenty of power and oodles of speed, and it was nature's blessing on me that her control was bad. Although hatched in captivity, she was descended from fowls native to the broad Sahara, where traffic congestion and sharp curves are the least of a traveler's troubles. So while a marvel on the straightaway she was weak on the turns. And also she had no brakes.

Doc Cook, the old push-over, had no science. Him being a practically stationary target made him Lena's meat. Myself, I let her come just so far; then I side-stepped and a shower of feathers wafted down on J. Wallsworth Milgrim when she hit the fence right in front of him.

In the split second it took Lena to recover from the jar I was only a jump from the corner of the cage. She was a little wobbly when she got stepping again, but her pick-up was something to beat all the auto ads you ever read. Two hops brought her into high.

I led to the turn and gained when she tangled there, but before I made the next corner her hot breath was on my neck. We made a full circuit with the gallery in an uproar, and when we come around a second time I was still out in front by a neck.

Mayor Milgrim was going into his dance again as we swept past the grandstand.

"Slower!" he shrieks. "Don't strain her."

I was slowing up as it was. There was stitches in my side that had no connection with laughter and my wind was just about gone. One more lap at the outside and I would be Lena's.

She had another steering-gear failure at a hairpin bend where the fence took off on a tricky angle. I netted maybe twenty yards, practically the depth of the cage. But I struck the back-stretch lagging and it was plain that the end was near. Even if they opened the gate for me now I knew I would never make it ahead of that aggravated ostrich.

We had shade on the back-stretch. Big trees grew close to the cage and spread leafy branches over the roof-bars. That was the end where I made my stand. It was Hobson's choice. I could not go no further.

As Lena pulled out of her snarl at the hairpin below I thought of the Liederkranz. I lobbed it to her, but she was a single-tracker. She give it one brief sniff and shook her wings and dug in her toes for a Bonthron getaway.

When she was halfway to me I had my back set so hard against the bars that I looked for some days like I had been on a broiler. I squeezed that toy bat until my hands dripped, and I would gamble that the drip was part sap.

LENA was half running and half gliding. Four hops would of brought her to me and she took three of 'em. Then all of a sudden she stopped dead. I don't

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know how she managed it, but there was a fountain of sand went up and when the air cleared Lena had took root no further off from the back fence than I could of reached with the bat.

And you would of hardly believed that she was the same ostrich. Her eyes was all whites instead of all brimstone. She had fetched up with one claw in the air and seemed to have froze that way.

My guess was that she might of learned something about firearms and stopped on a sudden suspicion that I was holding a rod. It was a quick guess, with no time for mulling. If I was going to take action it had better be while Lena was in that undecided frame of mind. Positively.

I took a step forward to try her out, half expecting her to swing into kick formation. She didn't. She just shivered all over and cast her eyes to heaven like she was Bertha the Sewing-Machine Girl and I was leering Mr. Ginsberg, up to no good.

A breeze rustled the leaves up above as I took a second step and she shuddered again to the toes of that hanging foot.

"Lena," I says firmly but not unkindly, "are you finished?"

I kind of circled her. I remembered how she had took Doc Cook over, and thought that after all I had better not get too close.

But she was not acting now. She cast one horrified look at me and a last look aloft. And then mighty Lena, the late bear-beater and man-killer, was burying her head in the sand clear down to them distant tonsils.

Over by the front fence there was a burst of hand-clapping. J. Wallsworth Milgrim himself was leading it and the admiral with the keys was opening the gate. But before I exited I stood there a minute alongside Lena, fondling the bat and looking skyward.

FELIX MACNAIR got back that night, barbered to the cuticle. He took hold and I let go, having in good season rounded up Alonzo.

Him and Smithers and Milgrim and me had a session at the Bott-Plaza after lunch next day. When it was over J. Wallsworth and been three-timed and Milgrim Park Zoo owned Alonzo. The price sounded wonderful, but slices to Smithers and MacNair brought it down to just average. All said, I cleaned about enough to settle with the doc that took care of my nervous breakdown in N. Y.

Before I left Bott City I had a private gab with Felix.

"I want you to promise," I says, "that you will keep Alonzo and Lena far, far apart."

"You don't need to ask it," says McNair. "You may think this and that about Lena, Durkee, but down under that tough old hide of hers she is only a bird. Even the sight of a little garter snake throws her into hysterics. And if she ever got an eyeful of a big constrictor like Alonzo she would certainly pass out."

He looked at me very curious.

"By the way, Ed," he says, "I never knew you to be an ostrich-handler. But they tell me you sure put the Indian sign on Lena. Now, how?"

I thought a minute.

"It's done," I says offhand, "with Liederkranz cheese. But Camembert or Limburger would of been just as good."

And that was fact enough, too. You bet it was. Say, if Alonzo had not been trailing the scent of the Liederkranz, would the old glutton ever of been in that tree over Lena's roof looking so piercingly down through them bars?

THE END

IMPORTANT NOTICE:

The customary vote coupon for ARGOSY covers was inadvertently omitted from this issue and from the issue for August 31. Readers will find *three* coupons in the issue for September 14.

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Silver Thaw

Every trick known to desperate loggers was being used to keep Tim Donovan from getting his timber out

By
FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

WHEN "Cyclone" Donovan, Northwest logger, was escaping from a forest fire, he noticed a woods drama that was to influence his life and the lives of his two sons. A female cougar, trapped by the fire, had the choice of saving one of her young and leaving the other to shift for itself.

Cyclone decided that the mother knew what she was doing in making her selection. So, twenty years later, one of Cyclone's sons was pampered, the other to shift for himself.

When a silver thaw brought to earth much of the timber belonging to the two sons, it was Bud who received a helping hand from Cyclone. Tim, the other son, was left to get out his own.

Joining forces with the Overtons, traditional enemies of the Donovans, Tim began a daring plan of taking out whole logs on a turbulent river. He enlisted the aid of several CCC boys, among them Donnybrook McDuff.

Despite the enmity of the two families, Tim found himself attracted to Ruth Overton, sister of the nine Overton brothers. Tim's problem was complicated by the fact that he had apparently killed Chris Nord, Cyclone's woods boss.

This story began in the Argosy for August 24

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Despite Tim's good work, his men were outnumbered

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE CUFF.

"WHERE'S the boy caught on the tree?" Ruth Overton asked. "I saw him, and I knew he must be injured."

"He's up the river, topping another tree," Tim informed her.

"And you let him?" she asked angrily.

"He couldn't help himself, lady," a man said. "Donnybrook laid one on Donovan's jaw, and that settled the question."

"Tim, did—?"

"Sure," Tim answered.

His eyes were on the tree tops upstream.

"I'll tell you the straight of it, Ruthie," Kentucky promised.

His eyes, also, were on the tree tops. A falling limb was their first hint of Donnybrook's position. He was on the other side of the tree and therefore not visible, but falling limbs continued to mark his upward progress.

Kentucky whispered the story to Ruth, though there was no reason for his lowered voice. Yet, somehow, the tense silence among the men commanded whispers. Each appreciated the struggle Donnybrook must be undergoing as he forced himself to perform an act that had almost caused his death.

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It was a long time before the top fell, but it fell. Fifteen minutes passed, then they saw him coming. He was icy calm now, and only the flames in his eyes betrayed the man's feeling of triumph as he turned his dark-bruised face towards them. He walked straight to Tim Donovan.

"What next?" he asked.

"We'll call it a day," Tim answered.

"It isn't quitting time yet," Donnybrook retorted.

"All right, lend a hand with the drilling," Tim directed.

As Donnybrook continued to the site of the drilling operations, Ruth Overton's eyes followed him.

"The darned wood tick," she said softly. "Game as they make 'em."

"That's why I picked him," Tim said.

Kentucky had something to say on the matter later. "He's taken the play from your hands, Tim," he said, "and that's bad considering the crowd you are dealing with. They'll follow his leadership."

"What's the matter with that?" Tim asked.

His voice reminded the mountaineer of Cyclone's when facing similar situations.

"There's nothing the matter with it as long as you lead the leader. But—can you?" he asked. "And now for some bad news. Gaspard's building a truck road to Scow Bay. I talked with him on my way up. Words leaked out that you're going to raft tree-length logs out. He expects the raft to break up on the bar, and he's building a road to salvage the logs."

"That's a fine idea," Tim agreed. "At low tide he can safely run the heaviest logging truck over miles of hard, sandy beach. What a swell time that buzzard's had picking bones. Come on, Kentucky, and give me a hand with the scow. I'm taking it a quarter mile up Hell-Roaring Canyon. You'll get wet, but it'll put some fire into your sluggish bloodstream."

MEN handling the wire rope from above carried it to a boulder and made it secure. Tim opened the throttle and the slowly revolving drum began taking in the line. With improvised sweeps they wedged the scow around boulders, while the river's half-concealed fangs gnawed at the wallowing craft's heavy bottom planks.

There were shocks that shifted the cargo and knocked the two men flat. Once or twice Kentucky looked at the canoe Tim was towing. Breaking water flooded the scow repeatedly, and tricks of the current smashed it against the sheer walls, but Tim kept the throttle wide open.

Once he looked up. Faces were peering over the edge, a hundred feet above. His own face was drenched and his shirt sodden. Tiny streams of spray were running down his tin pants-legs and dripping from their stagged bottoms. Kentucky's pipe was out, for no matter which way he turned it, spray filled the bowl.

Giving the scow a scant twenty feet of cable mooring, Tim shut off, and pulled the fire. The thunder of water drowned out the cheering above, but Kentucky knew it was there. Open mouths and waving arms were ample proof. He tied the whistle down and joined Tim in the canoe.

They landed in the first slack water and climbed to the bench above the canyon.

Donnybrook was just pulling a drill, ready to knock off for the day. He ached in every joint, but he said nothing.

"That's deep enough," Tim said, measuring the last set of holes. "Have the boys bring down the powder and fuse. We'll try this idea out tonight."

The last hole was loaded by lantern light. Donnybrook's battered nerves received a final blow when Tim thrust a fuse into a dynamite cap and crimped it with his teeth. The stick was lowered and tamped into place, then all scattered but Tim. He lighted the fuses and trotted upstream.

The blasts were timed carefully. The first two would shake things up; the last blow out the overhanging rock and dam the canyon. With luck, hundreds of tons of earth higher up should spill into the stream, also.

The shocks, when they came, were deep

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and sullen. No flash of flame was visible. Rather, the rock lifted twice and settled, then heaved outward with sudden violence. A shower of rocks pelted the scow, and the canyon was filled with a heavy dust cloud.

Nothing was visible, but the continued roar of falling material was proof of Tim's success.

"You get the idea, boys," he said. "The water should rise to that jammed log. The scow will be lifted clear of every boulder in the canyon, and you can get her through to the camp the Overtons are building."

The remainder was clear also. The backwater would serve as a storage pond for logs floated down. Cables slung between the two gin poles could handle equipment which would lift the logs over the dam and swing them into the lower river without shattering. After that it was clear sailing to Scow Bay.

Patrols could keep the casual logs that stranded, moving. Supplies would be brought to the dam and relayed by water to camp.

AN odd silence followed the blast. It seemed to grow as they cooked the evening meal over open fires, and turned in for a night's sleep on heaps of fern leaves. Ruth was curling up on needles she had scraped up under an old tree; Kentucky was smoking his pipe and Tim was finding contentment in just being in the girl's presence.

"It's still," Ruth said.

"Yes, Hell-Roaring Canyon no longer roars," Tim answered. "It doesn't seem natural. The water's backed up, and what noise the stream makes is up a ways. That should be covered by morning. I hope the dam holds, but I won't wait to see. That scows starts moving at the peep o' day."

And at the peep of day Tim was firing up the boiler. Five minutes later he was joined by Donnybrook McDuff. The latter was limping, and Tim said, "You'd better give the ankle a rest."

"Rest will stiffen it up," the other answered shortly. "What's the program?"

"Get this scow out of the canyon, in case the dam lets go," Tim replied. "After that I'm going down to Mill City. We're going to need another donkey at the dam. I've got to buy one somewhere on the cuff, or skip pay day."

"You'd better not skip pay day," Donnybrook darkly advised. "And another thing. What about this girl, Ruth Overton? I like her. I've never seen a girl like her before. If a man got hurt in the woods she's the kind that'd pack him out instead of weeping over the body and waiting for somebody to come along."

"That's just her type," Tim assured him.

Donnybrook, with his cut face and black and blue marks, looked as if he had been through a real Donnybrook Fair this morning. Sentimental words seemed oddly out of place.

"What I want to know is, are you engaged?" he blurted. "Not that it would make any difference."

"No, we're not. We're enemies, enjoying a temporary truce," Tim admitted.

"Hmmmm!" the other reflected aloud. "That should make the girl and me friends. That's all settled."

"That's one point I'm not conceding, Donnybrook," Tim said quietly. "I . . . skip it," he concluded.

There was enough steam to start, and while the other fed the boiler Tim got the scow moving. Donnybrook! Ruth! Together in this set-up; working out future problems together.

He shook his head. Somehow he didn't like it.

He had hardly recovered from his surprise of yesterday, when the mere sight of her, after an interval, gave him pleasure. Now . . . this.

By nine o'clock, with the most of the gang running cable ahead and securing it, the scow was clear of the canyon and in moving water once more.

"Take her on up, boys," he directed. "I'm grabbing a bite to eat and then lighting out for Mill City." He hesitated a moment and then looked at Donnybrook and Ruth, who were getting acquainted

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over morning coffee. "McDuff is in charge while I'm away."

CHAPTER XIII.

"BLOW OUT THAT DAM!"

TIM DONOVAN was thinking he had killed two birds with one stone when he dammed Skookum River. First he had made it possible to bring needed equipment in. If necessary he could lift a yarder over the dam. Second, and what was equally important, no logs would be shattered in passing through the canyon. The expense of lifting them over the dam would be saved many times over.

With Kentucky at his heels, Tim headed for Scow Bay, where he could catch a stage for Mill City. Two miles from the dam a familiar figure loomed up. He walked with long, swinging strides, but a careful eye would have noticed a touch of the stiffness that comes with rage.

"Cyclone!" Kentucky muttered. "Now what?"

He looked at Tim uneasily.

"Forest Service trail," Tim said shortly, "and we've both the right to use it."

"He's walking slower than we are," Kentucky pointed out.

"Exactly, and that means we'll pass him in about ten minutes," Tim replied.

A heavy silence ensued and it lasted until Cyclone Donovan heard their footsteps. He turned, a half friendly smile on his face, and started to speak. Then his lips snapped tight and he scowled.

"Hello, Cyclone," Tim said breezily, as one logger to another. "Having a look around?"

"I usually keep an eye on the other feller," Cyclone answered. "I see you've dammed Skookum River. That's bad! The fish can't get up to the headwaters to spawn. Thousands of trout caught in the pool below the dam, too. They'll likely die. Water will get stagnant. The game commissioners are goin' to be madder'n hell when they hear of it. Most likely they'll do something about it."

"And they'll hear, of course," Tim suggested.

"Yep! As a sportsman, I can't see my favorite trout stream ruined," Cyclone said. "I'm on my way to the telephone. Got to have quick action, or it'll be too late to save the trout."

"That's right. Quick action is necessary," Tim agreed.

Cyclone gave him a quick, searching glance.

But Tim was gazing at a shallow pool, in which several dozen rainbow trout were floundering about. Sea gulls were winging their way in from the sea, eager to feed on any stranded fish.

For a good mile below the dam the situation was unchanged, then side creeks, emptying in, supplied fresh water; but the trout continued to remain concentrated in the pools. The running water was too shallow.

Unthinkingly Tim had given his father a most effective club. And he could rest assured Cyclone would use it.

Kentucky changed the subject to the weather and predicted there would be forest fires, and it was a good thing the CCC was building trails. He also dropped back and took a stiff swig from his pocket flask, to carry him through the period of tenseness he knew lay ahead. Cyclone had evidenced a desire to keep pace with them, and the mountaineer had a hunch the old logger hoped to pick up a hint or two of Tim's future plans.

THE situation, as bad as it was, became decidedly worse when Jacques Gaspard popped onto the trail a half mile from Scow Bay.

"Ah," Gaspard almost crooned. "The two Donovans have settled their difficulties and—"

"Like hell we have!" Cyclone roared. "This young cub's goin' to get the trimmin' of his life. Takin' on that Tracy contract! Huh! What the hell you doin' here, Gaspard?"

"For once, Cyclone, we see eye to eye. Only disaster awaits our ambitious young

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friend. But there's this difference: while you're planning to witness the sad outcome, I plan to cash in. I'm building a truck road to tide-water. Who knows, the modest sum I am investing may bring me a hundred thousand dollars' worth of logs."

Cyclone pounded ahead in silence. Gaspard's eyes rested briefly on the old Irishman's stout back.

"What a pair they would make," he thought, "working together. Tim's youth and aggressiveness; old Cyclone's shrewdness and experience." And how fortunate for him they had split. He decided to drive the wedge deeper.

Of late the fright of the independent loggers and their willingness to meet his terms was a picture—and a pleasant one—always before him.

"I hear the bank refused you a loan, Tim," he said. "If you get up against it, let me know. There's no love lost between your father and me. I'd like to see you give him a lacing."

"And maybe you'd like another smack on the pan," Tim retorted.

"Suit yourself. Now I'll hurry along. I have a man arriving on the stage," Gaspard returned.

"The buzzard," Kentucky muttered, "buildin' a road to pick up the logs when the raft breaks up; offerin' to loan Tim money so he can foreclose and grab the rest of his holdings—when he goes busted because the raft breaks up."

Kentucky was glad the Donovans separated on their arrival at Scow Bay. Tim went directly to a native boy. There followed a brief conversation, and the passing of money, then the boy disappeared up the river.

Tim encountered his father at the only telephone in Scow Bay.

"You tell the game commissioner," Cyclone was saying, "unless this is stopped trout will die by the thousands. The name is Cyclone Donovan. Yes, the man responsible is named Donovan, too. Tim Donovan. Address Mill City. Good-by." He hung up and barged out.

And Tim barged in, where he talked softer—and longer. But not to the game commissioner.

KENTUCKY was waiting for him when he came out.

"Cyclone just left," he said. "Bud came for him in a car. Bud offered us a ride, but I said no."

"Why'd you say that?" Tim asked.

"I suffered enough from the tension comin' down the trail," Kentucky explained. "Just thinkin' of it calls for a drink." He tilted his flask when Tim had taken a nip, then continued. "For two cents I'd hole in somewheres and stay until it was all over. The idea of Cyclone not keepin' his head and lettin' a mess like this develop never entered my mind. Well, here's the stage."

The Mill City jail gave Tim an uncomfortable feeling as the stage rumbled past it. He never knew when Chris Nord's remains would be found and an all too willing sheriff lodge him in it.

"Anything I can do for you?" Kentucky asked as they separated.

"Yes, look around until you find a man with a good donkey engine and abiding faith in Donovan's luck," Tim replied. "Then tell him I want to buy it on the cuff."

He called Monroe, the banker, on the telephone, and asked for an appointment.

"Some time ago," he said, "I touched on the subject of a loan. You didn't consider me a good risk. Now I'd like to prove that I am."

"Tomorrow morning, Tim, at ten o'clock," Monroe answered. "But remember, you've got to prove your case."

Cyclone had once made the remark that the family house was Tim's home as long as he wanted to stay. He decided to spend the night under the paternal roof. His room was in order, and there was a pile of unopened mail on the dresser.

A long letter from his California representative stated the mill was being moved to tidewater and no unexpected obstacles had been encountered. He needed money, however, and requested it be sent as soon as possible.

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Tracy's man Skinner sent a list of specifications. Skinner wanted to know how matters were progressing. Tim decided to wire him a single word, "Fine!" The remainder consisted of brief notes from friends and a letter from his college fraternity requesting he serve on a committee to refinance the chapter house.

"That should be pie if I pull through this," Tim muttered. He looked in on Bud, pondering seriously over Cyclone's business affairs. The old man himself was downstairs playing spit-in-the-ocean with several logging friends. Explosive bursts of laughter, the gurgle of good liquor, and a haze of cigar smoke drifted up the stairs.

Tim experienced a pang of homesickness, and Bud sensed it.

"Like old times, eh?" he observed. "I've held right along the old man should have laid off you after you won the Tracy contract. You foxed us on that one, so why not live and let live? But he's sore as a boiled owl because the Overtons are backing your hand."

"I know it."

"And he's scared stiff that something will develop between Ruth and you. An Overton for a daughter-in-law would start him talking to himself," Bud said.

"If he could talk some sense into himself, I'd consider it," Tim answered. "I think I'll turn in. I've got to face Monroe in the morning."

THE banker's private office was clear when Tim put in an appearance the following morning.

"You've got the Tracy contract; that's something," Monroe began; "you are a good logger, and that's something more. Against that is a Donovan trying to handle a bunch of Overtons. To make the sorry picture complete you have put a bunch of outlaw CCC boys on your payroll."

"I'll have one of the finest crews in the Northwest when this job's done," Tim predicted. "Now I'll need pay roll money; charter money for the tug—but that'll come later; and enough to buy or rent chain for binding the logs into a raft."

"Tell me something about the raft," Monroe said.

"It's been done before. The raft is cigar-shaped, forty-five feet in diameter and about a thousand feet long. It will take three hundred tons of one and one-seventh inch chain."

"And you plan to take this huge raft across the Scow Bay bar?" Monroe asked.

"Yes. They've crossed the Columbia River bar," Tim argued.

"There's a vast difference," Monroe replied. "As I see your entire proposition, it is a series of hazards."

"There are two hundred thousand known kinds of tree-attacking insects," Tim said, "and a lot of 'em are ready to pounce on that down timber. I have no choice. And it's the cheapest and quickest method of saving the timber and eliminating a fire and insect hazard. As a lumber town banker, you should back me up. If I lose, you're protected. There's enough standing timber to take care of any loans."

"Do you mind if I ask your father one question?" Monroe suggested.

"As a technical adviser to the bank, or as my business rival?" Tim queried sharply.

"As technical adviser," Monroe informed him.

"Go ahead."

Monroe picked up the telephone and called Cyclone's office.

"I'm talking with a man," the logger replied, "but I'll be right over."

Five minutes later Cyclone appeared and glanced from one to the other.

"Can a raft forty-five feet in diameter and a thousand feet long be taken across Scow Bay bar, Cyclone?" Monroe asked.

"It can't," Cyclone answered promptly. "I know, because I've taken soundings."

"Sorry, Tim," Monroe said. "There's your answer."

Cyclone grinned at his son.

"Well, cub," he observed in a satisfied tone, "this appears to be your day to take socks on the jaw." He signaled a brisk individual waiting in the corridor. "Meet Mr. Wilcox of the Game Commission."

"My business with you, Mr. Tim Dono-

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van," Wilcox said, "can be stated in few words—blow out that dam!"

CHAPTER XIV.

FOUR BITS IN THE RED.

IT was apparent to Tim Donovan that Mr. Wilcox of the Game Commission was very angry over the dam Tim had thrown across Hell-Roaring Canyon. And it was also evident the flames in Mr. Wilcox's breast had been kindled by Cyclone Donovan with the idea of blocking his son.

"Suppose," Tim suggested, "that we have a look at the situation—the first thing tomorrow morning."

"There's nothing to look at," Wilcox answered in a decisive voice. "You've built a dam, obstructing the flow of Skookum River; thousands of trout will perish and—"

"Mr. Wilcox, wouldn't you feel silly if you discovered you had been used as Mr. Cyclone Donovan's tool in a timber war?" Tim suggested. "Will the first thing tomorrow morning be all right?"

"Er—ah—yes," Wilcox answered stiffly. "Quite all right."

Tim looked at Cyclone, thrust his tongue between his lips and blew hard. The corridors of Mill City's bank echoed with the Bronx cheer. Banker Monroe repressed a smile; Mr. Wilcox lifted his thin brows in surprise while Cyclone let forth something resembling the mating call of a hair seal. With Wilcox, he stalked from the bank.

Tim caught a glimpse of Ruth Overton's trim figure hurrying down the street and he hastily left Monroe.

"See you later," he said, "I'm going to try and raise money enough to see this thing through."

"How about lunch, Ruth," Tim suggested.

"That'll be something for the gossips to talk about," the girl replied. "Tim Donovan and Ruth Overton lunching together. But I'm hungry. Let's go into the hotel dining room." Her eyes took on a calculating glitter. "Your father lunches there, doesn't he?"

"Yeah. Let's get chummy and spoil the old boy's meal. He's sure been making it tough for me lately. He told the Game Commission my dam's killing the trout and Wilcox ordered me to blow it out. Also, he told Monroe he'd taken soundings on Scow Bay bar, and the water at high tide isn't deep enough to float a seagoing raft," Tim said.

A WAITER met them at the door and Ruth said demurely, "That cozy little table in the corner, please."

The waiter coughed and blinked his eyes. "It is none of my business, of course, but—er—that table will be under Mr. Donovan's eyes while he lunches, and—"

"The little table in the corner will be just fine," Ruth assured him.

"What're you doing in town?" Tim asked. "I thought you were keeping the crew contented by supervising the cook shack."

"Donny McDuff came over to see me last night," Ruth explained, "and to sort of become acquainted. He is really an interesting fellow. And a fighter from the word go."

"Sure is," Tim muttered. She was calling Donnybrook McDuff Donny and it didn't set very well. "That's why I picked him!"

"The boys were worrying over payday," the girl continued. "Donny said the excitement of taking the scow upstream, clearing trail, and all that had carried them along. But a reaction had set in."

"That's logical," Tim admitted.

"I know what you're up against in the matter of a loan," the girl continued, "so I thought I might help." She displayed a document. "Power of attorney signed by Pap," she explained. "But it's about as effective as a European treaty. I can't raise a dime. Nobody has any faith in your success. Shhh! There's Cyclone."

The old logger stormed into the dining room and seated himself. The hush following his entrance attracted his attention

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and he looked around, scowled at Tim and Ruth, then picked up the bill of fare.

The two gave their orders, then Ruth smiled beguilingly at Tim. "He's watching us over the top of the bill of fare," she whispered. "This will just burn him up. Now tell me, how much is your bank balance? And make it look as if you were telling me you loved me."

Tim smiled tenderly and found it not difficult. "I'm four bits in the red," he answered. "I need a few thousand dollars so badly I'd almost be willing to let a loan shark write his own ticket."

Ruth's soul appeared to be in her eyes, and certainly her lips were tender and inviting as she leaned closer to Tim and said in a low tone, "You mustn't lose control of the situation, even if you do need money so desperately."

Cyclone's voice boomed, "Waiter, take this soup away. Tastes like dishwater. Bring on that mulligan."

"He's madder than hell," Tim chuckled. "Keep it up, but don't look so damned sweet. It's doing things to me."

"It was sweet of you to say that," she observed, and her voice carried to Cyclone's ears. Then, in a lower tone, "My brothers will work their heads off, naturally. You're taking their timber out, too. I'm sure Donny will gamble with us, and perhaps he can influence some of the others to take a chance. But most of the boys have dependents, and . . ."

"I know it. That's why I'm worried."

"Bend closer, Tim," she whispered. "The waiter has just placed the mulligan before your beloved father."

"Damn it, Ruth," he growled, "you're doing too good a job of this. And I'm not fooling."

"Oh, keep it up!" she exclaimed delightedly. "You're doing simply swell." For a moment she dropped her small, brown hand on Tim's big hand. "I didn't think it was in you."

"Those dependents must be taken care of," Tim continued. "I was sure, once I got the equipment on the job, the banks would take a chance."

"I'll ask Donny to talk to the boys with dependents, and—" Ruth began.

"Oh, damn Donny!" he blurted. There was a possessive gleam in his eyes and his jaw hardened. "I was born with a musty Egyptian curse on me. Always up against the impossible. And you are the first hurdle in life I recognized as such. Me, a Donovan, getting a crush on you, an Overton."

SHE smiled softly and thrust a pair of impudent, challenging red lips closer. Seventeen kinds of devils danced in her eyes.

"Sure, I told myself it was a high school crush; that it didn't amount to a damn; that I hated you and yours. We'll leave your brothers out of it. The hate's real enough. But you . . . a man can kid others, but he can't kid himself, Ruth. I knew that when I carried you through a tumbling forest to the ranger cabin. And I knew it again when I wandered around in a semi-fog after the fight with Nord. Otherwise, why did I turn to your country. There are plenty of hideouts on the Peninsula," he said.

He leaned back a moment and looked intently into her face. "I'd bet on myself to take every hurdle, but you. You've got me licked, Ruth. You must have known it that night when we agreed the Overtons must string with me long enough to get the timber down to tidewater," he suggested.

She almost nodded, but not quite.

"I was mellowed that night by Pap's moonshine. Each of us, to save his face perhaps, was trying to make himself believe he was tricking his enemy into a deal none of us could escape. Yet mellowed or not, I knew I loved you, and . . . always would. I knew I was licked. Now go ahead and laugh. Gloat over the proposition of a Donovan falling in love with an Overton," he concluded. "I'm not fool enough to hope to deceive you."

"Waiter!" Cyclone's voice filled the room. "Take this mulligan away. I could make a better one with a handful of spruce

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leaves, two alley cats and a boomman's rubber boot." He coughed behind his hand. "I'll take my check."

"There's no check, sir," the waiter said stiffly, "when the customer is dissatisfied. Policy of the house, sir."

Cyclone picked his hat off a wall hook, stared briefly at the girl whose face was radiant with victory, then stalked out. Doubtfully the waiter approached the two. "Is everything all right here?" he asked.

"Everything," Ruth answered, "is perfect."

But as he moved away, the waiter glanced doubtfully over his shoulder. Tim Donovan did not appear to be enjoying his meal any more than Cyclone had.

A half hour later Tim and Ruth separated. "If I can raise any money, I'll let you know," the girl promised, "but I'm not at all hopeful."

"I'm going over to the bank and see if anything has developed," Tim replied. "If not, well, I guess it's a case of letting some shark write his own ticket."

MONROE hurried a man from his office when Tim appeared. "Sit down," he said, "and listen to an irregular proposition. A very irregular proposition. A gentleman has offered to give you the necessary backing, providing you are unsuccessful in obtaining funds elsewhere."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. The offer came through an attorney," Monroe answered. "You are merely to sign an agreement to pay your pound of flesh—that is the exact phrase—on demand."

"It's damned irregular," Tim reflected. "Do I retain complete control?"

"Absolute control until the Tracy contract is completed, or you have failed," Monroe replied.

"It's any old port in a storm," Tim confessed. "I guess I'll have to take it. Hold on. Is the man Gaspard?"

"No, I insisted on that assurance," the banker answered. He got up and began pacing the floor. "That fellow's power is growing every week. I couldn't add to it by permitting him to get a strangle hold on you."

"And I'm to pay a pound of flesh," Tim mused. "That sounds like Gaspard. I didn't know there were two pound-of-flesh men in the Sound country. Make out the agreement and I'll sign it."

"It's all made out," Monroe replied. He regarded the signing as a gloomy procedure. To him the future was dark indeed, with the Donovans wasting their strength in civil war. Only that morning he had urged Cyclone to make peace with Tim, and failed.

As he sent the agreement to the vault, Monroe said:

"The money will be available at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. However, I'll honor any checks you may cash in the meantime."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GHOST WALKS.

TIM picked up Wilcox early the following morning and drove to Scow Bay. An outboard, attached to a light canoe, carried them within two miles of the dam and from this point they followed the Forest Service trail.

Frequently Mr. Wilcox would dash over to the river bed and check up on the pools. They were very shallow; he could see countless trout, but they appeared to be receiving plenty of fresh water.

"I don't understand it," he said. "There is nothing on which I can base a complaint as long as the fish are receiving fresh water, and can proceed up the stream to spawn."

"This isn't the spawning season," Tim reminded him. "When that comes around the dam will be out."

"It must be leaking now," Wilcox suggested.

"I hope not," Tim replied with feeling. Ten minutes later they looked down on the long, narrow lake forming behind the dam. "I had to raise the water so

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the scow would clear the boulders in the canyon," Tim explained. "When I realized my father could block everything by complaining to the Game Commission, I had to step fast. I ordered pipe brought to Scow Bay, then all hands came down, packed the pipe to the dam and installed a half dozen siphons. If the flow isn't satisfactory, more can be put in."

"Quite satisfactory," Wilcox agreed. A trace of a smile played around his lips. "I was determined not to even discuss the matter with you, but—er—ah—quite satisfactory. And when the water rises to the top of the dam, naturally the normal volume will resume flow. I am afraid I shall have to disappoint Cyclone Donovan by reporting there are no grounds for complaint."

"When you make the report tell him his boy Tim sends love and kisses," Tim drawled. Then he thanked Wilcox and hurried upstream.

Tree-length logs were floating toward the lake. Here and there he saw clear-eyed boys in worn CCC uniforms riding the logs through stretches of white water, or jumping into the stream to keep them clear of sand-bars.

The blast of the yarder came frequently. High lead rigs were lifting the trees up and swinging them through the destroyed area to drop them into the river.

Gangs of men were cutting off tops and butts.

He crossed his own border, skirted Bud Donovan's timberland and continued on to Overton territory. Sweat poured from Pap Overton's face. The old feudist was doing the hardest work of his career.

"Them damned wood ticks," he complained, "got to shootin' off their bazoos about the number o' trees they could get in shape in a day. No snooty-mouthed city bums air goin' to better us, so me and the boys are showin' 'em some loggin' tracks with holes in."

"Things sure are moving," Tim agreed.

"Yep, but I don't have time to look after my still," Pap moaned. "Kentucky Logan's keepin' an eye on it. Don't suppose the cawn likker he makes'll be fittin' to drink, but it cain't be helped."

TIM rolled up his sleeves and went to work with the Overtons for the remainder of that day. The clang of a steel bar against a circular saw, suspended from a limb, announced the evening meal.

Everybody knocked off work and raced to the cook house. Even the Overton boys, deliberate by nature, were running. Tim found himself in a well built log cabin. The kitchen was located in a lean-to, built in the approximate center so flunkeys could serve both ways. Beyond stood the barracks, or bunkhouses.

Already the CCC boys had graveled the streets, transplanted small trees, flowers and ferns, and were making their temporary homes attractive.

Icy water ran steadily from a pipe fed by a near-by spring. A bear cub chained to a tree offered comedy relief; and a caged "whistler" had given up the idea of escaping and was making hay from the grass the boys supplied.

A small cabin had been built for Ruth Overton, and she divided her time between the place and home. With the help of a former army mess cook, she looked after the cooking and supplies.

The first month ended with the silver thaw area yielding to the combined attack of the CCC boys and the Overtons. The full flow of the river was spilling over the dam and out-board powered canoes kept the camp in supplies. Pay day came every week.

A calmness followed; men never actually let down, but the pace was slower. Tim was conscious of Donnybrook McDuff's intense dislike. The man carried a chip on his shoulder constantly and Tim attempted to tame him with tough jobs. Invariably McDuff completed each assignment and asked for more. When he was not working or sleeping, he was paying rough and ready court to Ruth Overton.

"I'm going places," McDuff informed the girl one evening.

"With Tim Donovan?" she asked.

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"Not in a thousand years," he answered quickly. "Nor will any of the other boys."

"In you boys Tim sees the finest crew in the Northwest," Ruth said. "He's told me so again and again. He's proud of you and to use his words, he'll go to hell for you any day in the week."

"Huh! As soon as this job's done, we take our cut and drift," Donnybrook told her. "Tim's got a kind of a way of making a man fighting mad. He stung us pretty hard the first time he saw us, and we ain't forgetting it. I socked him on the jaw once and he stayed down. I can do it again."

"Weren't you surprised when he went down and stayed there?" Ruth asked.

"Well, to tell you the truth I was. It sort of gave me faith in myself. I was just on the point of turning yellow. I hate to admit it, but it's the truth. Then when I socked Tim and he didn't get up, a feeling came over me and I said, 'McDuff, the world's your oyster!'"

Ruth listened with interest. She was not familiar with the self-confident type that boasted, then made good. Donnybrook's courage the day Tim lowered him from the tree had won her admiration. In him she recognized every element of leadership. It only awaited development. But the men of her acquaintance achieved first, and even then seldom talked about it. This man was telling her exactly what he was going to do.

"I HAD a chance to sell out to Gaspard the other day," he said. "He offered me a good thing if I'd take the others with me. He isn't so sure now Tim's going to lose that raft on the beach."

"And why didn't you take it?" Ruth asked.

"In a way it'd been throwing you down," Donnybrook informed her. "I mentioned it to the boys, and it seemed like we could sort of see Tim standing there, watching us go down the skidroad and his silent lips saying, 'Rats. Quitters!' I guess we hate him so much we couldn't quit."

"That is possible," Ruth said thoughtfully.

"But let's not talk about that tramp," Donnybrook suggested. "I want to show you something."

He led the way to a bench which the silver thaw had exposed by blowing down all the timber around it. "When this land is cleared you can see the straits of Juan de Fuca and the Pacific Ocean on clear days. And look at the mountains behind us." He pointed to the snow-capped Olympics, tinted pink by the setting sun. The fresh green of the forests swept boldly to the east, north and west. "And don't forget that little waterfall," he added.

"I'm not missing a thing," Ruth replied.

"That bench is rich, black loam. Anything will grow on it. I'm going to own that some day—have my private power plant and swimming pool, an up-to-date house and . . . if I get the girl I have in mind, well . . . all the millionaires in the country can go to hell," Donnybrook concluded. "I wouldn't trade places." His expression changed as he looked at Ruth.

She had seen a similar expression on Tim Donovan's face, once. "When I see light, something more than I'm getting right now, I'm going to talk it over with the girl. I hope you understand, Ruth," he concluded. "That's why I don't go to Mill City with the boys Saturday nights after the ghost walks. My pay is headed for that bench."

AS long as Tim was on the job, he drove the Overtons and his own crew remorselessly. It was drive, drive, drive! And he worked as hard as any of them and ignored the sullen expressions that grew day by day.

One afternoon he did some figuring, and that night called them together. "Two weeks from tonight, at ten o'clock, the raft crosses Scow Bay bar," he announced. "You Overtons had better see that the remainder of your logs are in Skookum River by next Saturday night. As for you," he added, turning to his crew, "the more logs you send downstream, the greater your cut."

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"Why ten o'clock, two weeks from tonight?" Donnybrook asked. "Any particular reason for it, or are you just trying to show your authority?"

"That's the stuff, McDuff," one of his companions yelled, "talk up to him. He's been driving us like slaves ever since we came on the job." He gulped. "It'd serve him right if we quit him cold. We'd lose some, but he'd lose more."

"So you can't take it, eh?" Tim jeered, talking into their angry faces and moving toward them step by step as he spoke. "I told you exactly what you'd be up against at the start. You could've quit then. If any of you pull out now, I'll personally knock hell out of you or take a good drubbing trying. To answer your question, Donnybrook, two weeks from tonight—"

Tim hesitated, questioning the wisdom of showing his hand.

"Two weeks from tonight—?" Donnybrook softly queried.

"Before I bid on the Tracy contract, I took soundings on the bar," Tim said. "On the average high tide the raft would strand. Two weeks from tonight there'll be a plus tide that'll give us four extra feet of water. The raft goes out then, or not at all."

"And one way to get even with that baby," a man named Slim said softly, "is to make sure the raft don't go out on that high tide."

Donnybrook edged over to him. "Not so loud, Slim," he warned. "Come with me. I want to talk this over in a nice quiet place."

The nice quiet place was the bench Donnybrook coveted. He regarded it several seconds, then gave Slim his undivided attention.

FROM Slim, Donnybrook went straight to Tim's cabin. "How'd you like to make a deal?" he said. "I've acted as straw boss and that entitles me to something extra. I'd like to take deed to ten acres on that bench, including the falls, and call it square. Also, I'd like an option on the surrounding hundred acres."

"Thinking of settling down, eh?" Tim suggested.

Unconsciously Donnybrook glanced towards Ruth Overton's cabin. "Yes, I am," he snapped. "And I'm thinking of Ruth. So are you. No need of beating about the bush."

"You've changed since that night I made you a proposition at the Indian River CCC camp," Tim said.

"Yep, I've changed. That's twice I've been told that tonight," Donnybrook answered. "Do I get the deed?"

"You are asking me to sell you the tree in which you'll build the love nest," Tim said. "Considering all things—that's nerve."

"That bench is the kind of a place Ruth'd like to live," Donnybrook argued. "And so . . . I want it."

"That's nerve," Tim repeated, as though he had not heard the other's last words. "And I like nerve!" He unrolled a blue print and traced a line, which included that portion of the bench marked, "Falls." He then traced an additional area and marked it option. "Take this down to Mill City, Donnybrook, and my lawyer will make you out a deed. I'll sign it the next time I'm in town."

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHO HIT SLIM?"

TIM was awakened the following morning by a CCC man's puzzled voice. "Who hit Slim?" he asked.

"Damned if I know," his companion answered. "Slim isn't saying who or why. In fact, he's moaning our bunch ain't what it used to be. Gone soft, he claims. He said there was a time whenever he had a bright idea, we'd fight to back it up. Now . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Slim still has ideas," the first said in a lowered voice. "If that Mick logger can't get his damned old raft over the bar, we won't lose. We'll just file labor claims on the logs and the sheriff will sell 'em to the highest bidder. Slim sounded out

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Gaspard and the frog slipped him fifty bucks and a promise to make a bid that'll cover the claims."

Donnybrook McDuff's rasping voice intruded. "Hey, you birds, more work and less talk. We made an agreement to get these logs to Scow Bay and we're going to do it."

"Donnybrook," one of them muttered, "you've sure changed. You're practically Tim Donovan's brother."

"Damned right I've changed. So've you, but you don't know it," Donnybrook growled. "And I hate Donovan's guts, and always will. But . . . get to work."

Tim could not help hearing, but he let the incident pass, though it proved Gaspard was reaching his crew through Slim.

The period that followed was the hardest he had ever known in the woods. But Saturday night there were eight million feet of logs either in the raft at Scow Bay, or floating in the Skookum River above the dam.

Not a man went to Mill City to celebrate. The Overtons dragged their weary bodies to their mountain homes and the CCC boys rolled into their bunks, many of them without undressing.

Tim stood, with his legs far apart, his big hands cupped on the end of a double bitted ax. His tired body would have swayed but for the tripod formed by his legs and the ax. Sweat dripped from his brow and rolled down his weathered cheeks. He wiped the sweat from his eyes and peered into the canyon. A man could walk the length and breadth of it on tree-length logs. Thus far his men had cheated Nature out of the loot of her silver thaw.

Within his breast was an elemental urge to discuss the achievement with some one girl; to relax, look at her and talk. His was the emotion of the primitive man who laid the kill at the cave mouth; or the knight who rode ahead of his shackled enemy. Tim Donovan wanted no praise. He wanted to do something he termed utterly foolish—sit with Ruth Overton, forget she was an enemy who scorned him, and believe the job was not done for Tim Donovan and Pap, his nine sons and Ruth. Rather to imagine it was a deal which began that day in the forest when the ice burdened trees crashed, and old Phantom stalked a trapped girl; and to imagine that the task was completed for the benefit of a community of two.

"I'm getting soft," he muttered. But his steps led him towards the cabin. Even as he followed the path to the door he heard Donnybrook's deep voice. Another had trudged to the same cave mouth to display his kill.

"I'm going in there and settle this now," Tim muttered.

THE impulse to kick the door down was overwhelming. He checked himself with difficulty.

"I got a toehold on that bench, Ruth," Donnybrook was saying. "I'll get the rest of it. And I'm here to ask the girl—"

Tim stalked off. The feeling Donnybrook put into his voice would have moved anyone. And yet it was the voice of a strong man for all its pleading quality. The man was revealing something of his soul.

"I can't talk like that," Tim growled. "I . . ." He whirled and looked at the cabin with eyes bloodshot from blind rage. "No man's going to take her from under my nose."

A moment later his hand was on the knob. He twisted it and barged in.

"Tim Donovan!" the girl exclaimed. "What do you mean? Are you crazy?"

"Donovan," Donnybrook interrupted in an icy, calculating voice, "I think I can take you now."

Ruth jumped between them. "Donny!" she ordered. "You sit down!" She shoved a hand into his stomach with such force he fell backwards into a chair. "Tim Donovan!" The girl's eyes were black with anger. "You . . ."

Donnybrook, eager for a fight, was getting out of the chair. "Donovan," he taunted, "only a girl is keeping you from getting a drubbing. I knocked you down once and you stayed down . . ."

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"Donny, will you keep still!" Ruth panted. At the same time she clutched at Tim's arms. McDuff's words had put the finishing touch on his fury, and he wanted to slug, maul, and feel the yielding flesh and bone of his enemy.

With a violent gesture he flung the girl aside. She struck the rough log wall and crumpled. Tim would not have noticed, but Donnybrook had turned his back and was down on his knees beside the girl.

Her ashen face and bewildered eyes sobered Tim. "Ruth!" he panted. "I'm sorry! I . . . let me do something. Something . . . Ruth." His big paws were shaking as he tried to fan her.

"Tim," Ruth whispered, "please—go! You've done—enough."

The cold air on Tim's hot cheeks was soothing to the flesh, but had little effect on a mind tortured with doubts. Now he realized that, subconsciously, he had hoped the mutual struggle would draw them closer and old enmities would be forgotten. "And I lost my head and blew my chances," he said bitterly. "If I ever had any chance. What the hell is it all about anyway? Fight, struggle, fight! Obstacle piling on obstacle."

Even as he complained he knew that fight, struggle and obstacles were his breed's meat and drink. His brother Bud, of the same father and mother, was different. He was made for estimates, costs and dollar watching. Tim, for getting the logs out. Queer, he reflected, old Cyclone had failed to select the snarling, elemental son to wear his calked boots.

Tim flung himself onto his bunk, swearing he would not sleep, and yet towards morning he must have slept because he was aroused by a pounding on his door. The sun was pouring into the cabin.

A YOUNGSTER with both eyes nearly closed, a swollen nose and blood-stained CCC uniform was standing at the door. Through puffed lips he said, "Cyclone Donovan's men are jamming the logs. Three of us tried to break the jam and were beat up."

"Jam!" As Tim uttered the word the possibilities of a log jam at this time leaped before him.

A single glance he took at Ruth's cabin when he emerged, then he bawled for Donnybrook. "They're jamming our logs," he yelled. "Bring the gang to the spot as soon as possible. I'm riding a log downstream—it's quicker." A half dozen Overtons were coming down the trail and Tim bellowed, "Moxt, Lakit, Togh-um, Sto-te-kin and the rest of you, come on!"

Tim raced down the trail to the donkey that was lowering logs from the dam to the river below. He jumped a log just as it left the pond, grabbed the cable for support and yelled, "Lower away!"

"Wait, I'm going with you!" Donnybrook yelled.

Five Overtons were faster and they straddled the log a moment before it was lowered. As it struck, Tim jumped to a free log, kicked it away from the wall and started downstream. Lakit jumped on behind him. "The boys'll knock out the hooks and send the tackle up for another log," he said. "The sooner we get there, the better."

Tim nodded and looked up. Every man in camp had gathered on the crest of the dam. As their log wallowed around a bend and into white water he saw another log, black with men, descending.

A rain had caused the Skookum to rise and it was living up to its name—strong. "Say, Lakit, we'll need powder, to break the jam. Go back and get that case and fuse left after we blasted. It's in that cave above the dam."

"I know where it is!" Lakit jumped to a stranded log and ran ashore. Tim went on.

CHAPTER XVII.

LOG JAM.

DRENCHED to the waist, but riding the log through the fastest water, Tim Donovan shot through a canyon of frothing water, and burst on a

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depressing scene for one who was racing tide—and time. A hundred and fifty foot tree-length log had been swung across the stream. Each end had wedged tightly against boulders. Logs following had piled up and several had gone over the obstructing tree and been kicked partly into the air, by the pressure behind.

Not an enemy was in sight, strange in itself. The Donovan loggers should have remained on the job to defend their work if they wished to make the jam complete. Two battered individuals sat on the bank, dazed from the sudden attack.

"Hello, boys," Tim yelled as he jumped ashore. "Where's everybody?"

"We tried to break the jam and they beat hell out of us," one of them said. "Maryett got away and ran to the camp for help—"

"That's why I'm here," Tim interrupted.

"When they saw they couldn't catch him, they figgered the boys would be coming soon, so they went uptrail to jump 'em," the one with the clearest mind explained.

"They'll be back," Tim predicted. "The boys are riding logs downstream. The trail's too slow." He looked around. "Where're your tools?"

"Shovel's down on that bar." One of them indicated a sandy stretch where logs had grounded frequently. Tim got a shovel and set to work, hoping to free enough earth to start the obstructing log moving.

The job was half completed when three of the Overtons appeared. As they joined Tim, a yell came from the bench above them. A score of the toughest men Cyclone could recruit from Northwest logging camps poured down.

"My kingdom for a pick handle," Tim yelled. He broke off a club and swung it. Part of the earth clung to the knotty part of the root. It was an effective weapon. It cracked down on a logger's head and drove his rain-stained hat over his eyes, leaving a blond scalp exposed. The fellow went down and got up. He walked over and stared at the river—out on his feet.

Pressure of numbers forced Tim's small group into a corner. Cyclone's voice bellowed, "Run the wood ticks back into the river. Keep 'em going." He ran across the jam as he yelled and took on a two hundred pounder coming to Tim's rescue.

One of the Overtons went down, and Tim was dazed by a fist that had come out of the press of bodies. As he shook his head a second fist nailed him between the eyes. Togh-um Overton split the skin across his knuckles on a Swede's head and winced.

"They're gettin' us, Tim," he grunted. "Another hour and we'll never break this jam."

TIM fought on through sheer instinct. The Overton shoulders touching his were comforting. A writhing heap of loggers lay at their feet. Somebody was trying to crawl over the jam and get above them, but Togh-um jumped, caught a leg and hauled him down. Swinging the man high over his head he smashed him down on the shoulders of his companion.

"He's through for the day," Togh-um grunted.

"And so're you," a logger bellowed, as he laid a club on the side of the mountaineer's head. Togh-um dropped and never moved. Booted feet moved back and forth over his prostrate figure and Tim fought with but one Overton at his side.

"Get together," Cyclone warned. "The wood ticks are coming down the river." He reorganized his forces, scattered as they picked off isolated members of Tim's crew. Cyclone was bleeding at the nose and from a cut over his left eye, but his eyes flamed with the unholy light of conflict.

The pressure lessened around Tim. He got to more favorable ground and looked upstream. Donnybrook McDuff was running over the jam and the tough companions he had gathered in the CCC camp were at his heels.

"Slim," Donnybrook was saying, "I busted you in the eye once for wanting to pull some dirty stuff before the job was finished. Get into this scrap to your ears or I'll bust you again."

Behind the group following McDuff came

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a string of others, riding bouncing logs. Most of them were wet to the ears, proof the bucking white water had thrown them off.

"Get Tim Donovan," a brawny logger yelled. "Cyclone will take care of the wood ticks."

Tim, battered from head to foot, and breathing like a yarder after a long pull, jumped into the open where he could swing freely. He kept off two determined men, but a third jumped him from behind and he went down.

The attacker began kneeing and gouging, while one of the remaining pair started kicking. "And I thought I knew something about dirty fighting," Donnybrook muttered. He left his fellows and made a flying leap, landing on the back of Tim's attacker.

Tim kicked the gasping man free, and got up. A Swede had thrown himself on Donnybrook and was dragging him between two logs. "Aye kick in purty feller's face, bay yeez," he promised. Then his teeth met in the lobe of Donnybrook's ear. Holding him partially, the Swede tried to get his legs around McDuff's squirming body.

"Lars," another blond Viking shouted, "Aye hold him down. Ve'll make wood tick squeal . . ." He would have planted a calked boot in Donnybrook's unprotected face, but Tim pulled a trick an old time French-Canadian logger had taught him. He jumped and struck the Viking in the chest with both feet, then landed on his own again.

A kick in the ribs made Lars release his hold on Donnybrook's ear.

Tim lifted the fallen man to his feet and said, "We've got the jam almost clear of 'em. Let's get that gang over there."

UNDER their flank attack the last stubborn knot of fighting men broke up. Hot blood was pounding through youthful veins and when one is young a taste of anything is never enough. They had tasted free for all fighting and liked it. As yet bruises and wounds were not hurting, nor would they until reaction set in. Tim's crew rushed on, until Cyclone's force was completely scattered.

Back on the boom Tim forced open an eye that was nearly closed and peered upstream. Lakit was squatting on a fat cedar, his knees gripping a case of powder; hat pulled tightly down around his ears; eyes watching the water to read its depth and be prepared to jump to something else when the cedar grounded, or lodged against hidden boulders.

Donnybrook's lips were a crimson smear, but he wiped them with the back of his hand and said, "Jeez—riding dynamite through the rapids."

The fourth Overton came over the jam, with the case on his shoulder. "Here you are, Tim," he said. "Sorry I didn't get here in time for the fight. Had a little one of my own. Two jumped me a half mile upriver." He removed his hat and handed Tim a coil of fuse which he had kept dry. A pocket yielded caps.

It was dusk when the battered crew stood back and watched a gray spiral of smoke come from the fuse. The report was tremendous. The obstructing log and those about it were blown clear. A great column of water went into the air and settled.

"Into it, boys," Tim yelled. "Keep them from jamming again. They'll come thicker than you can handle for awhile. Follow 'em downstream. It's all hands' job."

"Is there anything I can do?" It was Ruth, breathless from a hasty trip down the trail.

"Sure," he answered. "Bandage up the wounds when there's time. While you're waiting, watch the bars and pick up trout stunned by the explosion. This will give Wilcox of the Commission the willies if he ever hears of it. But the gang's going to eat fried trout for breakfast tomorrow morning."

The moon was up when he watched the last log drift past. The Overtons and the former CCC boys had done their job. All that remained for Tim to do was to get

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the raft over the bar and then pay the pound of flesh to the unknown man who had advanced him the money to complete operations. "Yeah, that's all," he muttered with a trace of sarcasm.

His crew discussed the fight in terms of victory, but Tim knew if the delay prevented them beating the plus tide, then victory lay with Cyclone Donovan.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PIRACY.

TIM DONOVAN, the Overtons and Donnybrook McDuff with his gang of city-bred incorrigibles stood on the shore of Scow Bay and watched a gang of experts complete the sea-going raft that was to take eight million feet of logs to Tim's mill in California.

The last tree-length log was loaded into place and a cheer went up from the battered group. Kentucky Logan and a keg of his best moonshine had inspired the raft crew to break all records.

With a plus tide due, the raft had to be ready or the labor of logging the trees laid low by the silver thaw would be for naught.

Tim Donovan's mind was a conflict of thoughts. What had become of Chris Nord's remains? Would the sheriff arrest him on some charge that would keep him in jail until the body was found and an indictment prepared charging him with Nord's murder? Tim's own recollections following the fight were vague. He had fought the latter part of the battle through sheer fighting instinct.

If the raft successfully crossed the bar, would Cyclone Donovan continue the fight against him until both were weakened? In that case they would become easy victims for the powerful Jacques Gaspard. Tim stared across the bay at a group sitting on a log overlooking the headlands. Gaspard and his men were waiting for the raft to strand and break up. A fleet of trucks was ready to go into action at low tide.

Rain fell in a sudden squall that obscured the headlands. The boom of the surf was louder. The southwester which had blown up the previous night was strengthening. Storms often came with abnormally high tides.

Tim looked at the raft again. Literally his eggs were in one basket. If he lost that, he lost all. He was not forgetting he had agreed to pay his pound of flesh to the nameless party who had financed him when the banks refused aid. "That bird will make me pay plenty," he muttered. "Well, it was either that or nothing."

Kentucky came over with a flask. "How about a snort, Tim?" he asked.

"Don't care if I do," Tim answered. "Make it a stiff one." He swallowed the drink and heard the voice of its authority deep within him. "Thanks for keeping that raft gang at it."

"The old man's here," Kentucky said. "Bud drove him down this afternoon."

Raindrops were rattling like shot against the mountaineer's slicker, and dripping from the rim of Tim's hat. He was wet, but that didn't matter. Loggers were always wet. The last sea that crashed on the beach was a heavy one. Some of the wave rushed through the headlands and licked at the raft, as if laying claim. "What's the old man doing here?" Tim asked. "He's tried to stop me at every turn and failed. He wants to see the raft break up and gloat a little."

"Mebbe," Kentucky answered. "Again mebbe not. Cyclone's always been two jumps ahead of everybody else."

"While he's been fighting me he should have built a spur to Bud's timber," Tim observed. The men were erecting a tripod on the raft, and swinging a lantern, which they would light before putting to sea.

IN the forest behind them a tree crashed before a sudden gust of wind. Kentucky looked at the turbulent sea beyond the headlands and shook his head. He said, "Cyclone can always rush a spur to Bud's stuff. But it won't be profitable. He could have had yours and the Over-

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tons' tonnage just as well as not—the stubborn old Mick."

"This way will be cheaper for us," Tim said, "or ruinous." Another wave swept through the headlands. Wind whipped its crest into the air and some of the spray touched their faces. Tim licked his lips and tasted salt.

The tide had reached its normal line on the beach, and soon the driftwood, half covered with sand, would begin to lift. The water along the shore would be coated with scum, driftwood and dead things.

A whistle came suddenly above the pounding surf and they saw the bow of a powerful tug. It was drenched. Water still dripped from the massive anchors. It steamed into the bay and ruddy faced men lined the deck and looked at the raft. The cook leaned indolently in the galley door; a fireman came up for a breath of fresh air.

"Where's Tim Donovan?" the skipper bellowed.

"I'm Donovan," Tim answered. "You're right on time."

"There's a hatful of wind out there," the skipper observed with a trace of sarcasm.

Siwashes began to drift up from their village. The odor of burning driftwood was in the air. Smoke eddied about chimney tops and vanished in sudden puffs. A powerful native stood in the lee of a big canoe and his dark eyes shifted from the raft to the sea. He shook his head doubtfully.

Tim crossed the raft and boarded the tug.

It throbbed with power and life; seemed capable of anything, but the skipper cocked an eye at the black clouds rolling in from the southwest and shook his head.

"It don't look as if the weather will moderate short of tomorrow," he said.

"Tomorrow's too late," Tim said in an apprehensive tone. "This raft's got to go over the bar tonight on the plus tide."

"Hell, Donovan," the skipper retorted, "I wouldn't take a tow out on a night like this. Man alive, there'd be logs scattered from here to Cape Flattery. We'd never get clear of the beach."

"I'll gamble on that," Tim said. "It's my loss. I put in six months as towboat deckhand and I know what the situation is. But I've got to chance it."

"No," the skipper replied, his voice hardening. "I won't take a tow out tonight. And that's final."

"You wouldn't lose your tug, would you?" Tim asked.

"Hell, no. This tug can live in any weather," the skipper said proudly. "But we'd have to cut your raft loose. And she's worth a hundred thousand dollars."

"A hundred thousand at my mill in California," Tim retorted, "but not worth a dime—to me—in Scow Bay. I'll give you a release, take full responsibility for the loss of the raft, and be tickled to death to do it."

For the first time since he had tackled the logging job he was actually worried. This man was refusing, and Tim could not order him to proceed. He could only request.

"Sorry, Donovan. I'd be open to censure, even with a release," the skipper insisted. "It'd be a black mark on my record." He squinted at the sky again. It was darker, and rain was coming down in torrents. "I'll stand by until the weather moderates. Hell, you can see it's blowin' a gale o' wind."

TIM returned to his raft and members of the tug crew began turning in. The cook put a pot of coffee on the galley stove and rolled back the blankets on his bunk.

Tim stood alone, a darker shadow in the damp shadows of the roaring night.

The driftwood was bumping all along the shore now. Rising and falling with the oily swells that came through the break in the headlands.

"He's licked," Slim said. "We done our part; laid the logs down in the raft, but . . . he's licked. Let's go over and talk to Gaspard. We'll slap a labor lien on the whole business."

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Donnybrook McDuff nodded. "That's the safe way. And we hate Tim Donovan's guts, don't we? That's agreed!"

The men gathered about nodded. "We hate him plenty," one added.

"The poor bum's in a jam," Donnybrook went on. "Something should be done about it."

"We hate him," one of them agreed, "but something should be done about it. The poor damned fool is standing on his raft alone. Somebody ought to be out there with him. He ain't blubberin', you'll notice. His face is in the teeth of the wind. The poor damned fool."

"The poor," began Donnybrook, and looked around, noting Ruth for the first time. "The poor so and so," he muttered. "I know what he's thinking about. Let's go out there."

Kentucky Logan edged up. If Tim's head had been bowed, it would have been easier on him. But Tim's head was up and Kentucky found it upsetting. He had watched Tim grow. "He wins his first fight, then the sea and a damned skipper throws him down."

"The poor damned stiff," Donnybrook said, echoing Kentucky's sentiments. "We're going out. I know what he's thinking of."

They lined up silently back of Tim. Of course they hated him, but it made them feel good to stand there. It filled their breasts with a warm glow, like Kentucky's moonshine.

"What're you thinking of, Donovan?" Donnybrook asked.

"Piracy!" Tim said shortly.

"We thought you were," Donnybrook observed.

"To take that tug, chase the crew ashore and put to sea would be piracy. They probably wouldn't hang me, but I'd get a long stretch in prison," Tim reflected aloud. "I couldn't do it single handed, though."

"Who said you'd have to?" Donnybrook agreed. "But we feel sorry for you, you poor . . ." He concluded with a fighting term. "Besides, we're tough babies. Too tough for the CCC camp at Indian River. When do we start being pirates?"

"Now! In a half hour the tide will be up!" Tim shouted to make his words heard. "Who can fire a boiler?"

"I'll fire for you, Tim," Kentucky volunteered. "I've never had a still blow up on me yet. So a boiler—"

"She's an oil burner," Tim said. "I'm sure you can handle it, Kentucky. But . . . it's piracy."

"An ancestor of mine was hanged for it," Kentucky answered.

TIM detailed men for the different duties, then boarded the tug. The watchman never had a chance, because attack was the last thing he expected. A hand silenced his yell of alarm; strong hands passed him over the side and he was spirited over the raft to shore.

The skipper responded to Tim's knock and found himself pinned to the wall by Donnybrook and Slim. He was bound, but not without a struggle.

"Donovan," he warned, "you don't seem to realize this is piracy."

"I do, and you don't seem to realize that raft's got to go over the bar within the next hour," Tim retorted. "We're taking her over if it's possible."

"The tug can't handle it in this sea," the skipper roared. "Now stop this nonsense. The whole crew of you will land in the McNeil's Island pen."

"Sorry, captain," Tim returned. "I gave you your chance."

The others followed, except the chief engineer.

"No pirates are going to ruin my engines," he shouted as he was hustled ashore. "I'm going along."

"Good!" Tim exclaimed. "We'll give you all the men you need below."

Slim agreed to watch the engineer for signs of treachery. And for the same reason Donnybrook detailed a man to watch Slim.

"That sock in the eye might have made a Christian out of him," he reflected, "but I'm none too sure."

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Then the stand-by bell rang in the engine room.

CHAPTER XIX.

MEN AND THE SEA.

AS Tim's men took their places swiftly moving shadows crossed the raft and came over the side. And one of those shadows belonged to a man who had chosen this night to exact his pound of flesh.

Though coming from different directions the shadows vanished into the galley and there in the glare of lights, faces stared at one another in amazement.

The tug moved ahead under slow bell, while men astern payed out a two inch steel hawser.

Kentucky Logan detailed a man to take his place in the fireroom and hurried on deck.

He lifted a pot-bellied jug from the heart of a coil of rope and advanced to the wheel house.

"Tim! Ten years ago I captured the sunshine smiling on growing corn and imprisoned it in a charred keg. From the keg, I personally poured it into this jug. I now propose that on this cold, stormy night, we permit this imprisoned sunshine to once more give forth its warmth."

"If you're asking me to have a drink," Tim answered, "yes!" The tug was moving between the headlands and would soon be over the bar, with the waves sweeping the deck. Tim drained the cup. And as Kentucky backed out the door he bumped into a bulky figure.

"I'll have a jolt of that, Kentucky," a familiar voice said. "There's a tough night ahead."

"Cyclone!" Kentucky exclaimed. "You snuk aboard."

"Yep, hid in the galley until you got started. There's a fight ahead, and I ain't goin' to miss it." He tossed off a man-sized slug and met his amazed son's gaze. "Gimme that wheel, Tim, and you get aft and see if everything's shipshape. That raft will soon be nosin' over the bar."

"But I don't get this at all," Tim blurted.

"There's a hell of a lot of things a cub like you don't get," Cyclone retorted. "And even the older cusses miss the play at times." He shot a glance at Kentucky, and that worthy scratched his head. His mind went back to a day twenty years ago when a forest flamed and a cougar made a choice of her kittens.

The tug buried her bow in a green one and water sluiced along the deck, hissing triumphantly. This was a night for the sea—not men.

Tim Donovan splashed aft. The great hawser was yanking at the towing bitts and lashing the sea. It cut deep gashes in the water, lifted dripping to slash again. Wind screamed through the tug's rigging and moaned around the salt-crusted stack. The raft's lantern blinked timidly, still safe in Scow Bay, but the lone watcher knew the nose of that raft was over the bar.

In the shelter of the deck house Tim saw two figures clinging to a stanchion and with feet braced, watching the storm. "Donnybrook, you'd better get below," Tim yelled. "In a few minutes this deck'll be swept clean. Who's that with you?"

"Ruth Overton," McDuff replied, an odd mixture of admiration, disgust and worry in his voice.

"My God, Ruth, why'd you come aboard?" Tim asked.

"You pirates made the cook walk the plank," the girl answered, "so I knew you'd need another. Besides, I've gone through the first acts of this play and don't propose to miss the last."

"Well, get inside!" He caught her arm, grasped a line and hauled his way to the nearest door.

"That's the galley," Ruth protested. "Your father's in there. That's why I got out."

"He's in the wheel house now," Tim assured her. "Why, I don't know."

"Some deviltry, depend on that," she darkly observed.

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"Well, he's not going to wreck a tugboat with himself aboard," Tim said.

THE galley light revealed Bud Donovan. "What's this—a family reunion?" Tim asked. "What're you and the old man doing aboard?"

"Neither knew the other was aboard," Bud answered, "until we met here in the galley. I'm here on business and to watch the finish of the fight, and . . . to collect my pound of flesh."

"You?"

Bud flashed the agreement Tim had signed. "Sure! I advanced the money. Slapped a mortgage on some good standing timber I own—that Grouse Flat cedar."

"All right, I'll pay when the bill's presented!" Tim promised. It was all clear now. Bud had pulled a fast one, and Cyclone was watching Bud's interests as usual. Yet it was hard to believe Bud had imagination enough to conceive a master stroke of business. He was an office man—an inkslinger—and a good one. No, Cyclone was behind it all.

A sea crashed against the deck house and the walls shuddered under the impact. Donnybrook McDuff's face was the color of a half ripe orange. "I don't feel so good," he complained. "Ulp! Maybe I'm getting seasick. I've never been on the ocean before."

"You're getting seasick," Tim agreed.

"Poor Donny," Ruth said soothingly. "And there's nothing we can do about it."

"And I used to think I was a tough mug," Donnybrook moaned. "A rabbit could slap my face now and I'd cringe. Ohhhh! Ulp! Say, I'd better get some place—quick!"

He started for the door, but Tim grabbed his arm. "Don't open that or we'll have a chunk of the Pacific Ocean in here. This way!" He opened a small door leading to the tug's heads. "There, you'll feel worse now. You never feel better at a time like this."

Five minutes later a ghost of what had once been Donnybrook McDuff joined them. "I'm Irish," he moaned, "but England can darned well be mistress of the seas and I'll cheer her. Ooooh!" He snorted and shook his head. "Everything smells like fish around here. And just as I thought I was better a whiff of hot oil came from the engine room. Do you know, Kentucky's moonshine tastes better going *down*."

The tug pitched violently and rolled almost on her beam ends. Tim raced to the wheel house and found Cyclone, a cut on his head, groping for the wheel. Tim got the tug headed into the sea again. Each moment he expected to feel the screw tangling with the slack hawser.

"That was a close one. What happened?"

"A sea went clean over the house," Cyclone answered, "and I was flung again' the door. Got a crack on my head that floored me."

Slim appeared at that moment. "A sea busted over the raft and put out the light," he said.

"Thanks," Tim answered. He felt like telling Slim to swim out and light the lantern again. "Tell Kentucky Logan to come up here. I need him. And if you see a good man send him along, too."

SLIM disappeared and Tim was conscious the tug lacked steerage way. It could mean but one thing—the raft had grounded. He could picture Gaspard, on the cliffs, with the rain beating against him, waiting for the break-up.

Kentucky stumbled in. "She's grounded, Tim!" he bellowed. The howling wind and crashing seas almost drowned his voice. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, get the old man below. He's still dazed from a crack on the head," Tim answered. "Watch him!"

Kentucky led Cyclone away and Tim clung to the wheel. Presently Ruth joined him. "Slim said you needed a man," she said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Sure, stand by. I may need a messenger!" He did not look at her. The hellish hour when he lost his head and sent her spinning into the cabin wall gnawed

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on his memory. Tim admired fighters and tough customers, but he had little respect for a man who lost his head. And he had done just that.

He called the engine room. "Are you giving her all you've got?" he asked. "The raft's stranded. There may be a shallow spot a portion struck."

"I'm giving her everything," the engineer answered.

Five minutes passed. The tide would change in a few minutes and there would be less water.

Tim signaled slow bell and the engineer called back to check. He had little faith in the man at the wheel.

"Right!" Tim answered. "I'm letting the bow of the raft swing a little. It may work the rest of the raft loose."

As the tug eased the strain on the hawser the forward end moved northward away from the gale. Under the tremendous leverage exerted the stranded part dragged clear of the mound of sand. Tim rang for full speed ahead and for several minutes nothing happened. He took a bearing on a shore light and fairly held his breath.

"She's clear!" he yelled suddenly. "We're moving to sea!"

"You've won?" Ruth asked.

"Not yet," he answered. "There's a quarter mile of hawser between the tug and the raft. The raft hasn't taken the brunt of the storm yet."

A tow boat is by nature a patient craft. It never expects miracles of speed. Rather it wins its battles by wearing the enemy down.

An hour passed before Tim was actually clear of Scow Bay. It was a man-sized job handling the wheel and he said little. On the radio in the galley the wretched Donnybrook picked up a general storm warning. Small craft were advised to seek shelter. The crest of the gale would strike the coast at midnight.

HE made his way drunkenly to the wheel house and reported. "Thanks, Donnybrook," Tim answered. "Sorry you feel so lousy. But it'll all be settled by dawn. Then you boys can tell me to go to hell."

"Sure, we all hate you," Donnybrook answered. "But you're the only mug that ever tried to harness our energy. The others were afraid of us. You've given us action, and a chance to make something of ourselves. Just try and get rid of us."

"Thanks, Donnybrook," Tim answered. "It's still a toss-up. I may come out of this busted."

"Then we'll start from scratch with you," McDuff offered. "Of our mob of mugs only one even thought of easing the knife into you. I listened to him, got his plan, then busted him one on the snoot. He's the best man you've got now. His name's Slim."

Tim opened the window. "Stick your head out there. The fresh air'll do you good."

The salt spray whipped in and drenched their faces, but a trace of color returned to Donnybrook's cheeks. A long silence followed, then Ruth spoke.

"Tell me, Tim," she asked, "isn't that light ahead harder to see than it was a half hour ago?"

"Yes."

"Weather is thicker, then?"

"No! The tug can't hold the raft against wind and wave. The raft is towing us!" he answered.

"Oh!"

"The beach we'll hit now is twenty miles away," he said, answering her unspoken question. "I'll cut the hawser whenever the tug's in danger!"

In the hours that followed the storm reached its peak, and seemed to remain there a long time. The tug was in a smother of spray always, and green seas forced Donnybrook to close the window and go below.

Dawn revealed a storm-lashed sea and a grim coastline where the surf piled high, and often crawled up the cliffs to tumble back in foaming cascades. The bright green of the rain-drenched forest was shot with the splintered ends of trees that had lost their tops.

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The smoke of a coast to coast freighter was visible on the distant horizon. All ships were giving the beach a wide berth.

BUD DONOVAN came into the wheel house. He had been sick, but was over it. "Your pound of flesh is damned close to the rocks," Tim said.

"That raft isn't my pound of flesh," Bud answered.

"I might have known it. Well, let's have it?" Tim growled.

"Log my down stuff and we'll wipe the loan off the books," Bud said. "You see, I strung with dad until you got the Tracy contract. When he started bucking you after that, I—well, blood's thicker'n water. I figured the Donovans should pull together, particularly with a man like Gaspard closing in on us. When the banks turned you down I moved in. Had to keep under cover, because I was afraid you'd be suspicious. Also it might prompt dad to think of some new deviltry, and he'd already given you most of what's in the book."

"I'm going down and make coffee and sandwiches," Ruth said. "It's the cook's job."

"What's the matter with sending down divers and blowing out the rocks in Hell-Roaring Canyon while the dam's there and the water quiet? Then we can run stuff through right along. Put a mill at Scow Bay and take the lumber out on barges," Bud suggested.

"Good idea," Tim replied.

Kentucky Logan appeared several minutes later. "Cyclone got a wallop that kept him foggy most of the night, but he's all right now," the lanky mountaineer announced. "Tim, the raft is close to the shore. Never saw so many boulders. They stick up like teeth and all look hungry."

"Take the wheel!"

Tim, clinging to the rail, made his way aft. It looked bad. A half hour at most would find the raft in the midst of the rocks. He joined Kentucky and found Cyclone there.

"Let's get the anchors down," Tim yelled. "Maybe anchors and engine together can hold her. If they can't . . . well, there's an ax near the hawser."

Tim started forward, clinging to life lines rigged before the tug left Scow Bay. At his heels followed Bud. Then Cyclone. "Stubborn old cuss," Tim muttered, referring to his father. "No need of telling him to go back. He wouldn't go."

The old logger's eyes were gleaming. This was a fight. And he loved a fight whether with other men, a forest fire, or the sea. He was still groggy and weak from the blow, and he couldn't do much.

An anchor went down. Then another. Tim let out plenty of chain. The more chain, the better the chance of holding. They were big anchors, designed for this special purpose, but they dragged. The trio, drenched to the skin, went back to the wheel house. Ruth was there with coffee, in thick cups, which kept it warm. They gulped it down in silence. The boom of the surf was louder now.

"If the tug's engines had a little more kick," Tim suggested, "we might hold her."

"I think I'll go down in the boiler room and dry out," Kentucky drawled.

"Think I'll go with you," Cyclone said.

CHAPTER XX.

A CABLEGRAM.

CYCLONE DONOVAN was half dry when he emerged from the boiler room. He found Ruth at the wheel.

"Tim's aft," she said. "He's going to cut the hawser, unless something happens. If we weren't aboard and he owned the tug, I don't think he'd give up until the whole business was on the beach."

Cyclone inched his way over the deck house, between the securely lashed lifeboats, then descended a little iron ladder to the stern deck. It was awash, but Tim stood, ax in hand, sheltered by the deck house, his eyes on the raft.

"I gambled and lost," he said simply. "It was a good fight. I beat you, Cyclone, but the sea—"

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"Don't cut her yet," Cyclone answered. "Kentucky's got a hunch she'll hold. The tide'll turn and help offset the wind. You're a fighter! You're . . . a wolf, boy. Wolf Donovan."

"Thanks," Tim said shortly. He was suspicious. "It's unexpected coming from you."

"Queer," Cyclone reflected aloud, "but as I was just telling Kentucky it's funny people never figgered me out. He should've called the turn."

"You don't make mistakes often, Cyclone," Tim replied. "But most folks think you and the cougar picked the wrong kittens." He half started towards the hawser, but decided to wait a minute longer. After all, there was more than a hundred thousand dollars on the end of that tow line. There were his hopes and reputation, as well as a fat cut the CCC boys had earned.

It was imagination, but the tug appeared to have more drive. The engines were pounding harder.

Tim looked at Cyclone and said, "As I get the story, one cougar kitten snarled at the fire, the other whimpered, and the old cat selected the strongest and let the weakest go, and the weakest turned out to be old Phantom. At least I've always insisted it was old Phantom and it gave me something to cling to when you made the going tough."

"The cat picked the weaker kitten," Cyclone said slowly, "she knew the snarling one would fight its way out if anything could. That it would thrive on struggle and grow strong, hard and fit to take its place in the cougar scheme of things."

"Go on!" Tim said.

"I went home and I played rough. You fought back. Hit me with a rock. Bud whimpered, and I knew I'd always have to watch over Bud and take care of him; develop him. And you . . . you'd grow into a wolf if you had to battle hard enough. So I made it tough. It was hard at times. And when it was the hardest for me, I knew I was weakenin' and so I'd make it tougher for you. The silver thaw was the test. You had to win, or go down. The training period was over."

CYCLONE DONOVAN looked briefly at the sea, then a long time at the forest. He sighed regretfully, and pulled off his boots. "Here they are, Tim, your old man's boots. You're wearin' 'em from now on. The biggest fight is ahead. It's with Gaspard and when it's over either Gaspard or Wolf Donovan will run this part of the logging country. You'll lead the scrap, but I'll be in it. So will Bud. There's a weaklin' that's developed into a fairish logger. But he'll always be the inkslinger. And he's got loyalty. It tickled me to death when he hocked his timber and backed your hand. I was havin' a hell of a time not doin' it myself."

It was hard to believe, but the reef seemed no nearer. Seas continued to smother the raft, but it was riding with water under it. Tim's hand on the ax relaxed. The tug was shaking from stem to stern with the drive of its engines.

"I had a lot of fun once," Cyclone said. "That day in the hotel restaurant, makin' you two young uns think the sight of you together upset my appetite. Afterwards I went out and et two steaks. I've always wanted you to marry that girl, Tim. She's full o' fire and spunk. It'd mean the Overtons and the Donovans would pull together. Opposin' the match seemed the best way of bringin' it about. She'd do it to spite me. Have you . . . popped the question?"

"Lost my fool temper and spoiled everything," Tim growled. "Say, this tug's holding the raft."

He ran forward. There was slack in both anchor chains. "Hey!" he bellowed. "Bud! Cyclone! Give me a hand here! She's held. The tide's turned and we're getting out to sea. Let's get these mudhooks up!"

AS the northward drift towards the reef ended and the tug and her tow moved to safe water, Kentucky Logan emerged from the boiler room.

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"Put on this coat," Ruth ordered, "or you'll catch your death of cold."

"I'm drenched all right, but I can't catch cold. I'm full of Logan's Cold Cure." He donned the coat she held up. "The engineer's goin' to be awfully mad when he finds out what I done. I screwed down the safety valve and increased the fire."

"You did?" Tim grinned. "And by that margin, you saved the day. Say, what's that coming towards us?" He picked up a pair of binoculars.

A native canoe, manned by the same stalwart Siwashes who annually hunted fur seal, paddled out from shore. Tim identified most of the passengers as members of the tug's crew. The skipper sat in the bow, and he looked grim and determined.

"I suppose," Tim observed, "there's a marshal with a piracy warrant."

"I ain't so sure of that," Cyclone answered. "This tug outfit has done thousands of dollars of work for the Donovan Logging Company in the past. It hopes to do a lot of business in the future. I don't think the skipper will push a piracy charge again' the new head of the company. And just to make sure I'll put a flea in his ear as he comes over the side."

The wheel house was deserted, except for Tim and Ruth. "Well," he said, "we've been through another storm together. I wish there'd be more. I lost my head the other night, and for that I'm sorry. But it doesn't lessen the fact I love you, Ruth. There's Donnybrook McDuff, with his bench and falls. The trees I sold him for a nest. He's a crazy Irishman, too. Maybe at that he's a better bet. You and I both have hot tempers. There'd be storms, but the calms would be nice."

"And so would the storms, Tim. You poor . . . well, what Donnybrook always called you. If you knew less about logging and more about girls, you'd have known that I—I'm darned if I'll tell you—" she said.

Tim tilted up her chin. Not all of the mist in her eyes came from the sea.

"Then you'll marry me. There won't be time for a honeymoon. Gaspard will start a fight tomorrow. And there's no telling when Chris Nord's remains will be found and I'll be charged with murder. You've got to chance that."

"Poor Donnybrook," she answered. "He's so darned sincere. And so loyal to you. This is going to hurt him . . . a lot. So tomorrow we'll start the fight against Gaspard, and all the other things, together."

A voice intruded. "If you're not going to steer this tug, Donovan, would you mind if I took charge? Of course, I'm only the captain. And you're only a pirate."

"Sure," Tim grinned. It was evident that Cyclone had made the skipper see the light. The canoe was waiting for them and most of the pirates were already crouched in the bottom.

Ruth slid down a line and Tim followed. Astern, a native grunted something in dialect. Paddles rose and fell, as the tug moved southward, her hawser whipping the sea. Tim looked his father squarely in the eye.

"You've been on the inside of so much," he said in a low tone, "maybe you know what became of Chris Nord's body."

"Gaspard, I'm sure, knocked him on the head with a rock after he left the Loggers' Rest," Cyclone answered. "He saw a chance to involve the Donovans in a murder. I can't prove it, but I realized what the discovery of Nord's body would have meant, so I stowed it aboard the Ruby. She was headed for the South Seas, you know, and had no radio aboard."

"It must have been discovered," Tim said.

"It was," Cyclone replied. He fished in his pocket and handed Tim a cablegram dated several days previous.

It read:

CYCLONE DONOVAN,
Mill City, Washington, U. S. A.
Aye feel fer fight.

CHRIS NORD.

"It's pretty hard to kill a Swede," Cyclone observed.

THE END

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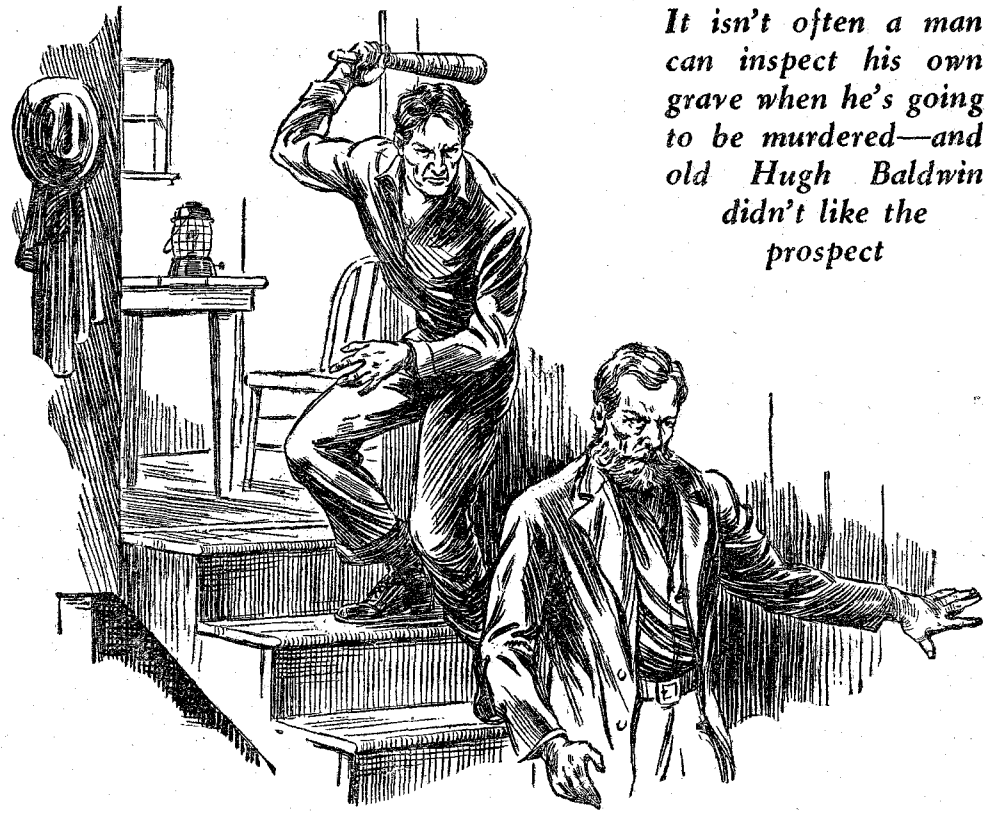

Curran struck from behind

It isn't often a man can inspect his own grave when he's going to be murdered—and old Hugh Baldwin didn't like the prospect

The Trap

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

LAFE CURRAN blinked patiently in the spring sunshine, while at the touch of his knife long shavings curled up from a pine splinter. He had waited months to find out a certain thing about the raw-boned old man who sat on another bench against the house wall, untangling a snarl of fish lines.

"If I hadn't been too cussed lazy to take keer of them lines," said Hugh Baldwin, "I wouldn't have to onsnazzle 'em now. The Lord ain't got but one law, and that's enough. Cussedness bounces jest like a rubber ball!"

"Uh-huh," agreed Curran. From the first it had been part of his plan to agree with everything Baldwin said. He had to keep friendly with him. Inwardly Lafe sneered, but no hint of what he thought appeared on his weathered, sharp-eyed face.

The clank and rattle of an old car suddenly smote the stillness of the mountains. It grew louder for all of a minute before the dirt road, forest grown to the very edge, yielded a steaming automobile that ran doggedly although it seemed to be little more than scrap iron.

A fat man, wheezing, climbed out from under the wheel and nodded at Curran and Baldwin as he came up. He fairly radiated haste.

"Hugh," he said, "I got to be in Port Thurman at ten o'clock this morning with as much money as I can get in cash to close a deal for some land. I ain't got

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time to go to the bank at Valeboro. Yesterday I had a sick hoss and couldn't go. You know my check's good. I was wondering if you could let me have a hundred dollars on a check?"

Baldwin put down the snarl of lines. His clear blue eyes with their bland expression that was never ruffled dwelt on the face of the visitor. The old man rose to his feet—a powerful, easily moving figure, although his hair and beard were white.

"Gabe Tompkins' check is good," he said. "Don't you want two hundred, Gabe?"

Tompkins wiped perspiration from his suddenly beaming face.

"Two hundred would just exactly fix me up, Hugh!" he exclaimed. "I was going to try to pick up another hundred somewheres along the road! Didn't want to ask for so much!"

"If a man ask thee to go a mile go with him twain," said Baldwin, "and from him that would borrow turn not away. You jest wait here a minute. I'll be right out."

Curran was so stunned by his sudden good fortune that he had remained, from the first words about money, with his knife motionless in the wood. Now he remembered that he must not appear interested. He turned up a perfectly curled bit of wood.

"Don't see much of you, Curran," said Tompkins, cheerfully. "Ain't seen you around the Corners store for a long time.

CURRAN grunted, while he strained his ears to catch sounds from within the house. He had kept to himself ever since he had suspected that Baldwin had a lot of money, because he did not want visitors. There would come a time when visitors would be very unwelcome. People must get out of the habit of going to his house.

"I see Baldwin a lot," he said. "He's nearby. Take a man that wants to work he can keep busy the year around. I don't have no time for the store. Chopping, hunting, trapping, spring work. Haying. Gosh!"

"I know it," agreed Tompkins sympathetically. He was filling out a check on the doorstep. Baldwin came out with some bills folded in his hand. Tompkins exchanged the check for the money, shook hands, and sprang into his car. It rattled out of hearing. Baldwin was already back at his work.

"None of my business," said Curran, choosing his words carefully, "but ain't it dangerous to keep a lot of money around the house?"

"Everything is dangerous," answered Baldwin, "if a man thinks so. After the banks had that spell of sickness I thought I'd better keep my money at home. The Lord helps them that help themselves. So I took care of my own money. It don't seem as though anybody around here would be mean enough to rob me."

He was a simple old fool, thought Curran. The time had come now. Lafe knew to a certainty that there was money in the house. That was what he had been waiting for. There must be a good-sized roll if Baldwin could peel off two hundred like that.

Since he didn't trust the banks he must have it all somewhere in that time-beaten little building behind them.

"Nobody that knows you would rob you, Hugh," said Curran. "I was thinking of strangers. You've kind of stuck yourself with a check now, ain't you? You don't save them things?"

Baldwin shook his head.

"I'll go to Valeboro tomorrow and get it cashed. Gabe was in a hurry and I ain't. No reason why I shouldn't make a trip for him. He's a neighbor, ain't he?"

"Sure," agreed Curran, tolerantly. He rose and stretched. "I got to go along home and hoe my young corn. When I get that done I'm going to put a cement floor in my cellar. I'll want you should see it."

NOTHING was more natural than that a man should put a cement floor in his cellar, if he could afford it. Lafe Curran hired a man to draw his

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cement and sand and then he went about the actual labor in a leisurely fashion.

He put the cement down in strips across the cellar, each four or five feet wide, and at the end of a week he had it all done but the last strip and a place about six feet by three under the plank stairway that led up into the house.

It was dark in the cellar anyway and it was very dark under the stairs. Not even a gasoline lantern, hung from one of the floor beams, lighted that space.

Everything was ready. Curran went down the road to Baldwin's place on a fine clear morning and found the old man sitting out in front mending a basket.

"Want you should come up and see my cellar bottom," said Curran. "I got it 'most done."

"I guess I better not," Baldwin told him, with a shake of his head. "I planned for strawberrying today and it's the only day I can take the time this week. They're prime right now."

"Golly, I need advice!" Curran let his head and voice droop. "I was depending on you to help me out. The last strip of cement didn't set right and I knowed you could show me how to mix it better."

Hugh Baldwin sighed and rose.

"All right, Lafe," he said. "If a man wants me to help him I figger it's a call from the Lord. I'll go, and mebbe the berries will be better this afternoon."

They walked along up the dirt road together, Curran busy going over each step of the plans he had made and Baldwin enjoying the fresh, bright green of June. He drank of the air, as though it were stout draughts of ale.

Curran led the way into the kitchen and opened a door.

"You go right on down, Hugh," he said, "and I'll be coming behind with the gasoline lantern. Can you see all right?"

"Can't see nothing much," replied the old man, chuckling, "but I can feel with my feet!"

Instead of the lantern that sat ready to light on a table Curran snatched a smoothly whittled club from the woodbox. He stepped into the cellarway behind Baldwin. The white head was a gray blur two steps below. He swung the club and brought it down with all his strength.

WHEN Hugh Baldwin opened his eyes he was decidedly uncomfortable. There was a dull ache in his head, a shooting pain across his chest, and a general feeling of discomfort that was as keen as pain.

He blinked in a strong light and shook his head. The gasoline lantern hung from a beam in front of him, a matter of ten feet away. He was in Curran's cellar, brilliantly revealed except for a dark space under the stairs.

Baldwin remembered that he had started downstairs to look at Lafe Curran's new cement floor. What had happened? Maybe he had fallen in the dark and cracked his head. He tried to move and found that he could not.

It came to him then that he was standing up. A moment before he had been sagging, although in an upright position. Slowly it dawned upon him that he was tied. One ache was from a rope that ran under his arms and across his chest. His wrists were tied together in front of him.

This was utterly bewildering. He stared around. He was standing on earth, against a wall.

A few feet in front of him the cement began and strips in graduated states of hardness ran to the opposite wall.

A faint scratching noise under the stairway caught his ear. He saw something stir there, and then the head and shoulders of Lafe Curran appeared against the cement floor. Lafe seemed to be crawling out of a hole. He stood up and brushed earth from his clothes.

"Lafe!" called Baldwin. "What in tunket's going on?"

"It ain't started yet," replied Curran, with a vicious grin. "It's going to start in a minute."

"What's the matter! Have I been having a fit or something? What be I tied up for?"

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"You're going to have a fit, all right!" Curran told him, and he laughed.

"Was you the one that tied me up? Lafe! You must of hit me when I wasn't looking!"

"That was the easiest way to do it," Curran said. "You're a tough old bird and I didn't know if I could handle you easy or not."

"But look here, Lafe!" cried the old man. "I thought you was my friend. What you done this for?"

"You'll find out!" Curran reached to the stairs and took up what was known in that neighborhood as a bullwhip—a long whip of braided leather with a knotted lash at the end.

"What you got against me?" demanded Baldwin. "Ain't I allus treated you the way a man ought to treat a feller man? If I ain't I'll make it right!"

"Listen, you crazy old coot!" exclaimed Curran. "You're going to tell me where you keep that money of yourn! Now hold on. Don't talk afore I get through. You'll say you won't and I'll give you a taste of this whip. If that don't make no difference then you're going into the grave I got ready for you under the stairs.

"If anybody comes down here looking for you, which they won't, there'll be fresh cement where you're standing and if they happen to see this patch under the stairway it'll look natural. And the grave is six foot deep.

"I'm telling you so you'll know I mean business. If I have to bury you I'll tear your house apart and find the money anyway, and get out. But I druther stay right here. You hand over the money and I'll let you go as soon as I get my hands on it."

THERE was a moment of silence. When Baldwin spoke his voice was low, controlled.

"Lafe," he said, "you're making an awful mistake."

"The only one that's got a chance to make a mistake is you," Curran told him. "What say? Where's the money?"

"I don't believe I'll tell ye, Lafe."

Curran drew back his arm. The whip whistled through the air. The lash, cutting like a knife, flecked against the old man's cheek dangerously close to the eye. A little red gash appeared. Baldwin flinched and caught a groan between his teeth. Curran laughed.

"I handled one of these here things in a medicine show once," he said. "I ain't out of practice so bad."

His arm drew back again. A three-cornered piece of flesh was lifted from Baldwin's jaw. Another red brand appeared over his eye. The old man braced his quivering body back against the wall and closed his eyes.

"Lord! Lord help me!" he muttered.

"The Lord helps them that helps themselves," mocked Curran. "Made up your mind to tell?"

The tip of Baldwin's ear was suddenly crimson. The hissing leather marked the backs of both his hands. His neck stung unbearably. Each touch of the lash was like branding with a red-hot iron.

"I guess I better tell ye, Lafe," he said, thickly. "It don't seem that money's worth what you're doing nor what I'm standing. I had to take a minute or two to get light on it."

Curran struck a final blow for good measure and rested his arm.

"All right," he said, "where you got it hid?"

"Go into my bedroom and move the bed," Baldwin told him. "You'll find a new piece of board about a foot long set into the floor. It's painted over and looks like it was nailed down, but the nails is stuck into gimlet holes. You can pry it up easy with your knife."

"All the money there?" asked Curran.

"Every dollar I got is down there, Lafe," answered Baldwin. "I wisht you'd leave some. I need a little."

"Listen," said Curran, "I'm going to see if you told the truth. Then I'm coming back. What you going to do if I let you loose?"

"Go home and put some lard on these here cuts," Baldwin told him, "so's they'll

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heal up. Would you jest as soon gimme a drink of water afore you go, Lafe?"

"When I come back," Curran said. He flung down the whip and went up the cellar stairs two at a time. Baldwin heard the house door slam. Then there was silence for a long time.

The lantern still filled the cellar with light. The old man looked down at his hands. The wrists were crossed and securely bound with manila rope. But the fingers were free and at the expense of pain there was a little play under the ropes.

Baldwin worked his right wrist forward half an inch. Then he curled his fingers up to the sleeve of his left arm. He set his teeth while his fingers struggled there, reaching, and finally the first and second fingers found the hard object that he sought.

With infinite care they drew it down. A small, sharp kitchen knife appeared. He worked the handle down to his palm and twisted the blade up between his fingers until the edge was against the ropes. Then with great patience he began to move the blade back and forth.

WHEN the ropes fell away from his wrists he was as good as free. He slashed the rope that passed under his arms and across his chest, and stood away from the wall. A ringbolt above his head held him suspended.

Baldwin crossed to the stairs, hesitated, and went for the lantern. He held it under the stairway and peered down. There was his grave.

"And Lafe calculates to put me there soon as he's got the money!" exclaimed Baldwin, wagging his head. "That's an awful thing for a man to do."

He went up the stairs and out of the house. The old man did not hurry as he walked down the road. He even stopped to bathe his face and hands in a brook and his step did not quicken as he drew near his own doorway. A groan came out from the bedroom as he entered the kitchen.

Hugh Baldwin stopped in the bedroom doorway and looked down. From a crouching position on the floor Lafe Curran stared up at him with glassy eyes. His face was drawn with pain, and now the greenish pallor of terror spread over it.

Curran was on his knees with one arm extended through a narrow opening in the floor. His other hand, clenched into a fist, began to beat against the boards. His lips twisted back and words left them in a scream.

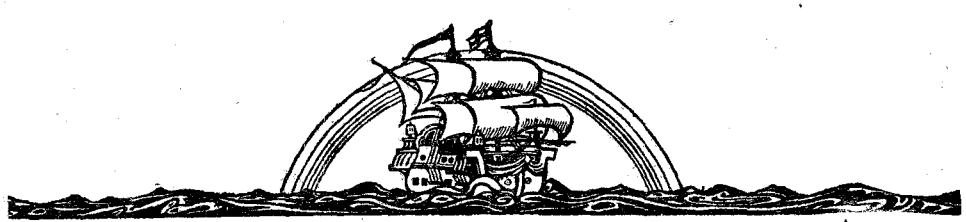
"Let me go!" he begged. "Or shoot me! I can't stand it!"

"Wait a minute, Lafe," said Baldwin. "You ain't got nothing worse than a broke wrist, anyway. That ain't half as bad as being buried under the cellar floor. While they's a chance of it sinking in I want to tell ye something.

"I never had no idee of being afeerd about my money until you said it was dangerous to keep it around. So I fixed me a knife up my coat sleeve in case I got stopped on the road when I was carrying my money, for I never did leave it alone in the house very long. It was that knife cut me loose jest now. And I set a steel trap down there big enough to hold a bobcat.

"If you hadn't got me to suspecting folks you might jest as well had that money, and me buried. I'll be gol-durned if I don't feel kind of sorry for ye!"

THE END



A 5—7

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Rusty dropped prone on the ground

Rusty Sabin, who had grown up with the Cheyenne Indians, knew fierce loyalties that his more civilized white brothers could not understand

The Sacred Valley

By MAX BRAND

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

BORN of white parents, Rusty Sabin was known among the Cheyenne Indians as "Red Hawk." One day while the resourceful Rusty is buying supplies in the town of Witherell with gold which he had mined from the Sacred Valley of the Cheyennes, he calls at the house of Richard Lester. Charlie Galway, who happens to be passing by, notices the nuggets of gold and, during his attempt to steal them, murders Lester, escaping apparently unseen. Lester's daughter, Maisry, who is in love with Rusty, is prostrated by grief.

The inhabitants of Witherell, aroused by the murder, accuse Standing Bull of the crime. Standing Bull is a Cheyenne, who was with Rusty at the scene of the killing. Rusty pleads for a fair trial, and when he sees that the whites are not treating his friend squarely, he and Standing Bull manage to ride off on Rusty's white stallion. But Standing Bull is severely wounded in the escape.

Not long after Rusty's return to the Cheyenne encampment, Running Elk, tribal Medicine Man, declares that the Sky People have ordered a sacrifice for Standing Bull's recovery. Rusty is taken to the Valley of Death to die, but Sweet Medicine, in the guise of a huge owl, leads him to a cave through which he escapes to the Sacred Valley.

The Cheyennes, now suffering from drought, decide that a further offering should be made to Sweet Medicine. So the young, beautiful Blue Bird, who is enamoured with Red Hawk, is led to the Valley of Death. Red Hawk chances to meet Blue Bird. Overjoyed at seeing each other,

This story began in the Argosy for August 10

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they ask Sweet Medicine for an omen giving approval of their desired marriage, but none is given. Blue Bird then leaves to go to her people, and Rusty rolls away the stones of the dam which he has built. Blue Bird returns to the Cheyennes and rain descends.

Meanwhile, Charlie Galway rides to the Sacred Valley and discovers gold. He approaches a lonely shack in the Valley where he encounters Rusty, who declares that Galway must die because he has entered the Sacred Valley. But a vague sign from Sweet Medicine saves Galway, and he is permitted to leave the Valley.

Galway plans to reënter the Valley with a band of his friends; and, inasmuch as Running Elk wants to meet the whites in battle, the clouds of war appear to be gathering.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLUE BIRD RIDES AWAY.

IN the camp of the Cheyennes, there remained a reaction after the departure of the war-party like the bubbling, swirling wake which passed over water behind a speeding boat. So in the village of the Cheyennes the enthusiasm of the people did not subside at once but, instead, expended itself in various small ways.

At night, the young men with musical instruments that made howling noises went to serenade their ladies. The dogs poured back and forth through the camp chasing imaginary wolves with a terrible clamor from dark to dawn. The old man sat down cross-legged to tell stories in the prowess of their youth, and the young men were overcome by the war spirit and yearning because they had been left behind so that at any moment of the day or the night they were impelled to leap up with a war cry and do a war dance in which with a war club or an axe they brained airy enemies by the score and took hundreds of invisible scalps.

That evening, half a dozen of the braves were seized by enthusiasm at the same moment and began to yelp and whoop with such energy that the dogs of the Cheyennes caught the enthusiasm of the idea and started to chase the imaginary wolves and fight over the imaginary bones again.

Standing Bull heaved himself up on his elbows and remained in this posture, half risen from his willow bed. Now that he made the effort it was possible to see how nearly he had recovered from his illness. The big shoulder muscles were filling out. Across his breast the traces of strength were reappearing. His skinny shanks were swelling day by day with the commencement of the huge power of his ordinary health.

The Blue Bird said: "He is only halfway back to earth from the Happy Hunting Ground, but already he wants to be taking scalps and counting the coup."

The two squaws of the brave smiled and nodded. They would not have dared to make such a remark about their famous husband, but they were brave enough to agree with that newly privileged person in the camp, one who herself had passed through an unearthly adventure.

Standing Bull looked up to the girl with a smile and watched the owl-feather that trembled continually in her hair.

"What is happening now, Blue Bird?" he asked. "Have they sighted an enemy? Are they surrounding him?"

"They have come to the end of the day," said the girl, still smiling. "They are tired. Their horses are white with dried sweat. Their stomachs are empty. There is only a little stale water left in the water bags. They sit about and chew some parched corn. They looked about them towards the ends of the earth. The world is a big place and honor is hard to find in it. Clouds are in the sky. It will rain on them before the morning."

"No," said Standing Bull. "They are pressing on through the hills. They see before them the town of the white men. They creep forward. As the night begins, they rush suddenly forward. The white men sit inside their wooden lodges and eat, and blind themselves with the light of their lamps. The Indians rush like a storm on them. The white men run out with guns. They are shot down, the tomahawk is in their brains, their red scalps are torn from their heads!

"Ah, my people! You forget what Red

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Hawk so often told you—that Witherell is not the chief city of the whites, that they are more numberless than the buffalo in the prairies! For this first blow you strike, you will be smitten a hundred times. All the Cheyennes will feel the strength of the white warriors. They will come by thousands, and every man will carry a rifle that shoots straight. My tribe will be lost."

"Will they go so far?" asked the girl, staring. "Will they go even to the town of Witherell, Standing Bull?"

"They will go wherever the evil brain of Running Elk can lead them," said the war chief. "He knows that before long I shall be able to ride a horse, and when that happens he will be no longer the head chief of the Cheyennes unless he does some great thing. That is the reason he takes three hundred warriors well-armed and rides away. He dreams of a great battle. The heart of the bad man never is small!"

"The wooden lodges of the white men are very strong," said the girl. "Sometimes they are made of heavy walls, and there are loopholes through which the guns can be fired. Every house is like a fort!"

"Suppose that the grass is lighted, and the flames sweep down over the town? The white men run out like frightened rabbits. The Cheyennes are before them in the streets, killing them by scores. But for every white man who dies, ten Indians shall be shot down later on. That is the word of Red Hawk. *Ah hai*, Blue Bird! If he were alive—as he is dead—he would be able to stop the madness of my people. No other man could do it!"

AN immensity of sorrow, a sense of doom covered the mind of the girl. All that she had seen inside the Sacred Valley must remain nameless. She could not even say to Standing Bull that his friend was not dead, but living. Or was it life indeed that Red Hawk had inside the Sacred Valley? If he were brought into the light and the air of common places, might he not be utterly dead and a ghost?

She began to tremble. She began to taste again the life in the Sacred Valley.

Afterwards, she made medicine.

She did it very simply, as one who could be sure that the Sky People would hear her voice and give her wisdom. In her father's lodge, she picked up a handful of dust and blew on it.

He sneezed and looked up from the book which he was reading by the light of a lantern with glass sides—a miracle to the Cheyennes.

"What's the matter, Blue Bird?" he asked her.

She raised her free hand to let him see that she was conversing with the gods. Then, with lowered eyes, she counted the small pebbles which remained in her palm, some of them almost too small to glisten.

The number was odd. It meant that the gods wanted her to complete a task. What could the task be? Why, the very one which Standing Bull had named to her!

Her father was saying: "You and I are going on a journey, Blue Bird. You're getting a little out of hand, what with all this medicine making, and dust blowing, and stewing of herbs.

"There's always a bad smell in the lodge and besides, I'm disturbed by all the women who come with their sick children to you and ask you for cures. Do you think that the Sky People really are telling you how to help the sick?"

She looked down again at the pebbles in her hand and then closed the fingers over the little stones.

She knew, now, what course she would have to take.

She got up suddenly, and left the lodge with bowed head. As she stood under the stars again, it was revealed to her what she must do.

From among the horses tethered near the tepee, she took the big colt with one blue and one black eye, the fiercest, the strongest, the wildest of the horses belonging to rich Lazy Wolf. When she returned inside the lodge, she took her saddle from the post from which it hung.

"Where are you away now, Blue Bird?" asked Lazy Wolf.

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Instead of answering, she picked up a small leather bag filled with parched corn, and a light rifle which her father had bought specially for her. When she reached the entrance to the tepee, Lazy Wolf called after her: "Confound it, Blue Bird, tell me what's up now! I'm getting a little tired of all this conversation with Sky People. Try talking for a while with your father and you may find one or two good ideas tucked away inside his old brain."

Her heart was pinched. She wanted to answer. It was her sacred duty as a daughter to answer the questions of her father, but a vow that held her was more binding still—she must not utter a syllable until she stood again at the awful entrance to the Sacred Valley.

She heard him muttering as she saddled the young stallion.

Her heart went out to him, but the vow laid a cold finger on her lips and kept her silent.

Now the horses were equipped. She mounted and rode slowly through the village. As she came out from among the tepees, from all the night noises of the town, she saw hanging in the east the thin, curved knife of the new moon.

She went on. The glimmering lights of the village grew pale behind her. And then a sudden rush of hoofbeats came roaring toward her and the shouting voices of young men of the night-guard who rode around and around the town. Not another woman among the Cheyennes would have abided that charge.

Only Blue Bird rode straight on at the usual dog-trot of an Indian pony.

They swept away. The dust from the hoofs of their horses stung her nostrils. Then she was alone in the night.

CHAPTER XIX.

A VISIT TO MISRY.

AT the gates of the Sacred Valley, for a long hour the Blue Bird cried on the god, and the only answer she heard was the whisper of the water running down the bed of the ravine, and the far off chanting of the waterfall at the other end of the valley.

Wiser people than she, perhaps, could have construed that echo into words with a meaning, but the Blue Bird merely withdrew to one side and lay face down on the ground, pressing the palms of her hands against it, praying to the Under Ground People. And as she lay there the dawn began, slowly, a light streaming gradually up around the edges of the great bowl of the sky.

She heard, at last, a light footfall on the rocks and turning her head was aware of a great elk, a king of his kind, standing at the entrance of the Sacred Valley. His head was lifted so that the great tree of horns sloped well back over his body. In spite of size and sleek weight, he had the look of a creature with winged heels.

The girl sat up, trembling with awe. This was the manner in which the souls of the dead heroes approached the Sacred Valley. Here was some famous warrior, clad in a new form, standing on the verge of Paradise. The elk turned his head, saw her, and bounded straightforward through the gates of the Valley.

The Blue Bird arose, her eyes shining.

In some far place on the prairies a whole tribe, perhaps, was lamenting for the death of a war chief; the voices of the women were screeching to the sky, their faces were marred by their own nails, their hair was cut short and clotted with dust as they howled. How could they know that in a form so new and splendid the brave man's soul was entering the earthly heaven of the Sacred Valley?

She went again to the mouth of the Valley and called out her prayer; and again there was no answer.

Always her prayer was the same: To send Red Hawk out from the Sacred Valley so that the war between the whites and the Cheyennes might be averted. The empty silence of the ravine at last weighed down her mind. She turned away full of uncertainty.

Red Hawk seemed to her half man and

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half god, who had passed through death into a higher life though he still moved and breathed upon the earth. He it was who should, as Standing Bull declared, hold back the Indians and perhaps check the white men.

How could he be drawn forth from the Sacred Valley on that errand of peace?

Then, suddenly, bitterly, she remembered the white girl, the blue eyes, the beauty, the smiling. Even the very presence of the god hardly could withhold Red Hawk, if he heard the voice of Maisry Lester calling.

Well, she was no longer Blue Bird, a mere name, a girl of no importance whatever; she was now a famous medicine woman and for the welfare of her people she must give up her last hope of gaining that happiness of which most women can be sure. She felt such pain that she put both hands over her heart for a moment and closed her eyes. Then she laid her course straight across the plains towards the distant town of Witherell.

It was the twilight of a day when she came to the edge of the hills and looked down into the shallow, dimly lighted bowl of the town. The English which her father had taught her was not very good, not very extensive, but it was enough to enable her to ask her way to the house of Maisry Lester. She remembered that other time and that other town which she had visited in order to see the white girl. She remembered sadly, and shook her head. Then she rode her tired horse down the slope.

She had been remembering all through her journey the details of wisdom which the Cheyennes had taught her about the whites. These were some of the items.

1. The God of the white man lives too high in the sky to be of any use. He is worshipped by clasping the hands together and rolling up the eyes. He never receives sacrifices that are worth anything, but he is pleased by the moan and howl of a pumping organ. Big wooden tepees are built in his honor, each tepee crowned with a long wooden finger that points towards the sky.

2. White men are half warriors and half squaws; therefore they are contemptible. They have dim eyes, ears that cannot hear, and no sense of smell. They fight to kill, not to be glorious. They are afraid of the beautiful prairies and lose their way more than children. The sun is not their father and the moon is not their sister. They deform their feet with hard leather and therefore they neither can run nor walk. Because they are afraid of the sun they wear heavy things on their heads. They work all day long like squaws, because they are shameless. A white man loves to lie. Wonderful to state, they even lie to one another.

3. White women keep off their feet as much as possible. They sit a great deal. All the rest of the time they lie down. They keep something in their hands, sewing with a good deal of skill but making silly things of no importance They are foolish; they love to gather together and giggle. They are cowards; they scream when they see even a mouse. They are cruel; they have been seen to strike little children many blows only because the children make a noise. They are selfish and will not let their men have two women.

UNDER such main headings, Blue Bird gathered her knowledge of the whites. Among all these people there were two exceptions: Red Hawk and the woman he loved.

Fear began to grow up in the breast of the Indian girl as she entered the first street of the little town. Far away, a whistle blew, with a terrible power, ripping the sky apart, cutting into her brain. She heard men laughing inside a house—bawling, horrible, meaningless laughter. She heard a baby crying, not the sweet, sad sound of a Cheyenne baby which makes the noise "*Ai! Ai! Ai!*" but a disgusting, booing complaint.

Into the sobbing of the baby rattled the harsh voice of a white woman. Blue Bird heard a sound of blows. The baby began to scream. The Indian girl gasped and put her hands over her ears.

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She hurried her horse on. Out of the wooden lodges streamed brilliant lights. Unpleasant smells of strange cookery reached her nostrils; she heard metal clatterings. The memory of the Cheyenne town rolled back upon her mind and made her heart ache.

How could Red Hawk have chosen one of these people to be his squaw?

A group of small boys came swirling out into the street, knocking up a cloud of dust, yelling at one another. The Blue Bird sighed with relief.

She called out to them: "Will you tell me the place where Maisry Lester lives?"

"Hey! Lookat! It's an Indian gal!" they cried at her.

A shaft of dim lamplight swept over her. She smiled and made a friendly gesture as she asked the question again.

"That way," said one of the lads. "Down there—the house with the two trees in front. Hey, who are you? Where did you come from? Are you a Pawnee? Who brought you here?"

Questions are dangerous. She fled from them, galloping her horse, and they pursued her only a little distance before they fell into another dusty swirl of wild play.

So she reached the house and tethered the Indian pony to one of the trees in the front yard. A single light burned at the rear of the place. She looked through the window, touching with her hand curiously the dry ice through which the light shone.

Inside, she saw Maisry Lester, alone, sitting at a kitchen table with her face in her hands. The jealous heart of the Cheyennee was touched.

The brightness of the hair, the slenderness of the hands held her eyes. She wore a dress that seemed to Blue Bird of great worth, for it was a printed calico. The design, the pattern, the color amazed the Blue Bird.

She went with soft steps up the back porch and tapped at the door.

"Who is there?" asked a small, weary voice.

Critically the Blue Bird examined that voice. She had remembered it too dimly. It was not like the voice of any other white, for it contained a real music.

"It is I!" she called in answer. "It is the Blue Bird."

A footfall came suddenly. The door was snatched open. She saw Maisry Lester's face full of startled joy, and then the white girl caught her in her arms. She used that strange white custom of kissing. But it was not very offensive. There was a clean, sweet smell about Maisry that was not unpleasant. It was not as good as the real smoky Indian smell, but it was not horrible, like the odor of most whites.

"Blue Bird, what have you come to tell me?" cried Maisry Lester. "What has brought you so far?"

Now that she had the full picture before her, the Indian girl stared, fascinated, into the blue eyes of Maisry. Blue eyes, she felt, were not as beautiful by half as black or dark brown; and yet there was a sort of shining color in them. The color of the eyes went with the color of the hair, like something painted very skillfully. Her skin was very pale, very pale. She was paler than Red Hawk ever became, even when he had been ill and remained out of the sun for a long time.

"Tell me—are you the squaw of some warrior now?" asked the Cheyenne.

"No," said Maisry.

"Do you wait for Red Hawk?" asked the Blue Bird.

She saw the white girl blench and the sight wrung her heart, but also gave her a cruel pleasure.

"Yes," said Maisry.

"Would you wait all your life for a dead man?" asked Blue Bird, more cruelly than ever.

"Yes," said Maisry.

THE Blue Bird sighed. There was a greatness of spirit in this pale-faced girl. There was something shining about her. She was not tall; she was not strong; but her heart was great.

If ever her voice sounded within the hearing of Red Hawk—no, not even the god could restrain him!

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There was a vast urge in the Blue Bird to flee away from the house, and never to set eyes on Maisry again. And yet an iron sense of duty held her.

She looked up, and it seemed to her that the beauty of the Sacred Valley unrolled again before her eyes. The god had sent her out from the place. His purpose, perhaps, was to drive her on to the whites, on to Maisry Lester, so that through Maisry the threatened war could be halted. Now the words poured suddenly from her throat: "I can take you to him. He is not dead. He is living, Maisry!"

CHAPTER XX.

A SIGN FROM RUSTY.

THE trail lay wide and clearly beaten before the eyes of Rusty Sabin. So many scores of warriors with their war ponies and the herd of extra horses driven on by a select number of youth who for the first time were on the warpath, could not pass over the green of the prairies without leaving unmistakable signs of their passing.

Now and then parties diverged from the main road, the whole body splitting up into small sections which traveled towards varying points of the compass. Then the trailing task became difficult, for each of the smaller bodies attempted to lay a good trail puzzle behind them as soon as they reached a dry ravine, or a stream which enabled them to make a problem for a pursuer.

If Rusty lost the trail of the group which he had selected, he would lose the trend of the whole march. Three times he was stopped for a considerable interval by these cunningly constructed puzzles, but on each occasion he was able to work out the solution and ride on.

He was strangely happy. The Sacred Valley, in all its beauty, remained somewhere in his mind as a lonely duty, not as a joyful place. He was away from the god's place, and yet the god had not deserted him. As the dawn was born out of the pale moonlight of that first night, he shot a scurrying rabbit, and as he dismounted to pick up the body, he felt before he saw the sweep of the broad, familiar wings above him; looking up, he recognized the huge night-owl of the Sacred Valley.

Had he come to accept the sacrifice, even if it were not actually living game? Holding up the limp body, he whistled; and instantly the owl swooped. The talons, like a powerful skeleton hand, grasped the rabbit; the softly rushing wings bore the owl away on high.

Rusty Sabin, looking after the soaring bird, saw it outlined jet black against the moon and the dawn for a moment; then it slid down into the darkness of the prairie. And Sabin laughed happily. This, certainly, was a veritable sign from heaven.

Late that evening he saw the war party of the Cheyennes. They were making a forced march by moonlight, and the long column went over a slight rise of ground, printing themselves as a small black picture against the sky.

Sabin took the White Horse at a brisk gallop through an arc that cut across the course of the column. He waited in a hollow until he heard the tramping of the hoofs. He waited with the stallion flat on the ground, almost covered by the tall grass. And at his word, the White Horse rose into view with Sabin in the saddle.

The half dozen scouts who preceded the rest were not a hundred steps away when they saw that vision appear from nothingness. A dead ghost of a dead horse—a vision from another world! Their sudden yell of dismay was music to the ears of Sabin.

They had halted. Two of them suddenly turned their ponies about and fled. The rest flung themselves on the ground and began to shout out prayers to the Sky People, prayers to Sweet Medicine.

Sabin rode straight on, at a walk, without turning his head towards the voices of his red people. But his heart was stirred.

Would the war-party dare to continue after such a vision had crossed its way? In the distance he made the stallion sink

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into the depth of the grass. There he left the White Horse and returned stealthily until he was close to the camp. The grass was a sufficient shelter.

Peering through the high heads of the grass, he could see the rising of a column of smoke. Out of the distance he could hear the thrumming of a drum. And he understood.

The Cheyennes had halted to make enough of a fire to raise a smoke of sweet grass in which they could purify themselves after the terrible vision of the White Horse and the ghost of Red Hawk. After that, perhaps they would attempt to continue the war-trail. If so, he would cross their way again.

THERE was a small wind stirring the grass, and it kept a whispering sound about the ears of Sabin. He never would have heard the other noise that flowed through the sound of the wind; it was the sudden shudder that passed through the body of the stallion that warned him, and the lift and sudden sidewise twist of the head of the White Horse.

A snake, perhaps, slipping through the grass?

Well, a snake would turn away from creatures so great. Still, the head of Sabin was turned and his nerves were strung to alertness when he saw, over his shoulder, a shadowy form rising, and the gleam of steel by the pale moonlight. The blow was not a downward cleaving stroke, but a sidelong sweep which was surer to bite home in some part of the body of the enemy. Rusty dropped loose and prone on the ground. The long-bladed knife came into his hand as he heard the tomahawk whish over his head. The body of the other lurched toward him, following the stroke, and Rusty turned as a cat turns when it offer its claws to a foe. He stabbed upwards and felt the knife blade glide through flesh and grit on bone, and drive deeper.

A great hand gripped Rusty by the hair of the head. He stabbed again upwards. The hand lost its power. The tomahawk fell idly in the grass. A loose weight dropped upon Sabin and rolled away from him.

He got to his knees. The White Horse was drawing great breaths of horror as it smelled the blood. And stretched before Sabin, vainly struggling to rise again, was a crop-headed Pawnee wolf. The moonlight slipped like water over the huge flow of muscles that covered his body. Among a nation of big men, he was a giant. He could not handle his own weight, but he intended to strike a last blow. The steel of his knife glistened as he dragged it out of the sheath of fringed leather.

Rusty caught the mighty arm at the wrist. There was no more resistance in that arm than in the muscles of a child.

"Die in peace," said Rusty, "because I take no scalps. I count the coup on you, Pawnee; and that is all."

"Ah," muttered the brave, "what bad fortune brought me to you? You are the friend of Sweet Medicine. You are Red Hawk the great medicine man!"

He sat up, clasping his body with one hand. The blood still poured from the terrible wounds he had received.

He began to sing the death-song, the words coming hoarse from his throat and with a horrible bubbling in them.

"Sky People, look down carefully. There is not much light; I cannot call loudly, but I am Long Arrow the Pawnee. I am the man who killed the white buffalo and sacrificed the skin to you. In the battle, I rode through the line of the Blackfeet and counted coup on a living warrior with a short stick. I stole the thirty horses from the Sioux. And I am the man who stole up in the night on the camp of the Cheyennes and killed the two braves with one knife.

"And I took their scalps and hung them over my fire. Cheyenne hair hangs from the reins of my bridle. The hair of Blackfeet fringes my leggings. You see that I have lived a good life and that I have hope of the Happy Hunting Grounds. And then you led me against Red Hawk.

"I struck with the hatchet and the hand of the god was put in front of it. I struck,

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and the body of a man turned into air and the stroke was lost. Sweet Medicine turned the tomahawk aside. He guided the knife into my body. The life runs out of me like water downhill. The pool is emptying. Receive me, my fathers!"

The big body pitched to the side. Sabin, steadying it with a strong hand, laid back the limp weight Long Arrow in the grass.

IT was a huge-featured face into which he looked, the nose high-arched and the mouth vast and thin-lipped. He never had seen a face more cruel, he thought. But any man who had killed a white buffalo and sacrificed it to the Sky People was, of course, a very good Indian.

It seemed to Sabin that there had been some truth in the death chant of the dying man. Perhaps the invisible hand of Sweet Medicine, so swift that it can reach between a man and his thoughts, had intervened between the tomahawk and its target. Perhaps it was Sweet Medicine who had driven the knife home to the life.

In that case, the body belonged to the god and not to the Cheyennes. For that purpose, and lest any man should claim that warrior or despoil him of his scalp, Rusty took from a little pouch at his belt a single soft owl feather, such as he found in the cave of Sweet Medicine, and tied it with a wisp of Long Arrow's own hair.

The drum beat in the distance had ended. He heard a rhythmic beating of hoofs and then a confusion of impacts such as are made by the feet of many walking horses And he saw that the Cheyennes were streaming forward. They had not turned back. They were coming straight along their original course.

The teeth of Sabin gritted together. This was the work of Running Elk, of course. The old medicine man with mischief in his heart had persuaded the braves that the appearance of the ghost was perhaps a good sign instead of a bad omen. And as the whole procession dipped out of sight in a slight hollow, Rusty again rose from the grass on the back of the White Horse.

The train was proceeding straight towards the place where the dead Pawnee scout was lying; and as it pushed forward over the rise of ground, clear in the moonlight the braves could see the White Horse stepping, and a shout of horror arose from many throats.

The forward movement ended. Half of the braves scattered towards the rear and, as before, a number flung themselves from the saddles to the ground. But Running Elk alone remained steadfast. He kicked his pony forward a short distance and then reached up both skinny arms as he shouted: "Red Hawk, if you come back from the dead to the living, tell us what the Sky People wish to say to us."

Sabin, for an answer, lifted his right hand and waved it in the signal which warns a man to go back. Then he turned his head and rode on at a walk. For he felt that the walking horse would be a more apt picture to present the idea of a return from the dead, a mounted ghost.

Behind him, he heard a sudden clamor. When he looked back he saw that the shouting of Running Elk had put heart in some of the warriors so that they had remounted and pushed forward a little distance to stare along the trail of the ghost.

So they had come on the spot where the dead Pawnee lay. And their yell of triumph turned suddenly into a familiar old chant in praise of Sweet Medicine.

The war party began to pull saddles from their horses. Whatever happened, they would go no farther forward on this night.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NOBLE MISSION.

THE Blue Bird sat cross-legged and looked for a long time at Maisry. Maisry had started to sit in a chair, but she changed her mind and sat down on the floor also, not cross-legged, but with her feet on one side and with her right arm supporting her weight.

"You stay in the chair," said the Blue Bird.

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"No," answered Maisry. "I'll sit the way you do. I'm not above you, Blue Bird."

The Indian smiled.

"It is so hard to hate you," she said, "when I want to love you."

"Do you hate me?" asked the white girl.

"There is Red Hawk," said the Cheyenne.

"Yes. There is he," said Maisry.

"You are very calm," said the Blue Bird. "You should not be so quiet. Look at me!"

"I *am* looking," said Maisry.

"I am not ugly," said the Blue Bird. "Look at me again. Do you see how I am not ugly?"

"I see very well."

"You must remember that Red Hawk is after all like a white man more than an Indian. A good Cheyenne brave thinks, when he takes a wife, how many horses she will cost, how many guns and buffalo robes. But a white man never thinks of how much work his wife will be able to do for him. He thinks more about how lovely she is. Do you understand me when I talk Cheyenne like this?"

"Yes, I understand you very well."

"*Ah hai*, Maisry, if your skin had been as dark as mine, we could have loved each other, unless we fell in love with the same man. But you never could be one who might be bought for a price in horses and other things."

"I don't know. I think I could have been bought," said Maisry.

"Maisry, when you say that, you are beautiful."

"When I say it, I feel very sad."

"Perhaps all women must be a little sad if they are to be beautiful."

"Do you think so?"

"Maisry . . . you see that my Cheyenne tongue can say white words?"

"You are half white, you know."

"My blood is all red."

"I know that."

"Do you hear that bird singing?"

"I hear the black bird."

"He is free," said the Blue Bird.

"Yes, perfectly free."

"*You* are not free," said the Cheyenne.

"No?"

"You are not free as Red Hawk is. He is strong and brave and he is as free as the black bird—if you would let him be."

"You think that I tie him?" asked Maisry.

"Ah, my sister," said the Indian, "don't you see that you do? Your God is not his god. Your skin is his color but your heart is not his color. You put birds in cages, but the meadow lark is not in a cage. He is unhappy; lines come between his eyes when he is with you. But with me there are no lines between his eyes when he is with me."

"Is he very happy with you?"

"For me he went into the Valley of Death."

"What is that?"

"The Valley of Death. He went into it. The god led him. He carried me from the Valley of Death."

"He carried you in his arms?"

"Yes. In his arms. And through the cave, through the house of the god. I was dead."

"What are you saying, Blue Bird?"

"Through the House of the God."

Her face flamed, suddenly. Through the golden obscurity of her skin the color rushed. And Maisry watched, carefully.

THE Indian girl went on: "Into my dead body he called back the life. The first that I knew was his voice above me. I was in the blue of the Happy Hunting Grounds and he called me back to the earth. His voice called me, praying to Sweet Medicine. Do you know who Sweet Medicine is?"

"Yes. Did Rusty pray for you?"

"That hurts you, doesn't it?"

Maisry drew a quick, deep breath. "You see, Blue Bird, we both love him. We should be honest and tell one another what we think."

"Well," said Blue Bird, "does it hurt you—the thing I have just said?"

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"Yes," said Maisry, and flushed.

They both were warm of face, staring at each other.

"Do you hate me?" asked Blue Bird.

"Yes," said Maisry. "No," she added.

"*Ai, ai!*" said Blue Bird. "Why should we both like him so much? There are many men in the world. There are more men than there are buffaloes, Red Hawk says, and yet we find only one."

"Yes," said Maisry, "that is true."

They stared at one another again.

The Blue Bird said: "I am going to cry. Cheyennes should not cry. But I cannot help it."

Maisry watched her with a cold face. The Blue Bird folded her arms across her face. She made no sound. Her body gently rocked to and fro, and the agony was a silent thing.

Maisry got up and went to her. She sat beside the Indian and put on arm around her. Suddenly the weight of the Blue Bird slumped against her.

The Blue Bird sobbed, openly: "I have seen a great many taller and stronger warriors."

"Yes," said Maisry.

"I have seen great chiefs with many scalps."

"Yes," said Maisry.

"I have seen warriors with the riches of a thousand horses," said Blue Bird.

"Of course you have," answered Maisry. "And men like that have wanted to marry you."

"Yes, they have," said Blue Bird.

"And still you think of him?"

"Yes, I think of him. The god compels me."

They were silent for a moment.

Maisry said: "Are you happier now?"

The Blue Bird was drying her eyes.

"I have been very weak," she answered. "Now I am better."

"Tell me, Blue Bird, about that Valley of Death—do you mean that you were very ill—or was it actually the Valley where the Cheyennes make their sacrifices?"

"It was that Valley," said the Indian.

Maisry reached out a hand towards her and left the gesture suspended in air for a moment.

"He carried you out of that? But how could he?" she asked.

"The god is his companion. He can do everything that the god wishes him to do. I can't talk any more about it or Sweet Medicine will freeze up my blood and turn me to dead stone. Maisry, there is another valley near the Valley of Death. It is the Sacred Valley where Sweet Medicine lives.

"I went to the entrance to that valley, just a little while ago, and called to the god and called to Red Hawk and begged them to stop the Cheyennes on the war-path and keep them from fighting with the white people. The god would not hear me; Red Hawk would not hear me . . ."

"Is that where he lives?"

"I can't tell you that," said the Indian. "I can't tell you anything I know about that. I can only say that if you went to the Sacred Valley and called, surely Red Hawk would come out in answer to your voice. I am only a dark-faced Indian. It is you that he loves. He would come and he could turn back the Cheyennes from the war-path. Will you go with me?"

Maisry, listening with eyes of desperate interest, exclaimed: "But the two of us—to ride alone through an Indian country . . ."

"There are not many Pawnees. Most of them are Cheyennes, and I could make you safe from all the Cheyenne warriors . . . Look! You have a very good horse."

She pointed out the window towards the pasture in which stood a blood-red mare, one of those rare bays whose skin seems actually to be dyed by the life-stream.

"I have a good pony also," said the Blue Bird. "Who could catch us, if we traveled mostly at night? Will you come, Maisry?"

The thought of the prairie seemed to Maisry like the thought of a wild sea, filled with danger. But every day of her life in Witherell had been a barren wilderness since the death of her father. And

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suddenly lifting her head she said: "Yes, I'll go."

"Good!" cried the Blue Bird. "Now? Will you come now?"

"Now—this moment," said Maisry.

CHAPTER XXII.

GALWAY'S EXPEDITION.

AN ounce of gold could buy a great many things in the town of Witherell, but on the equipment of his expedition Charlie Galway expended the last speck of gold dust from the sack which he had stolen. He spent so much organizing the outfit that people no longer referred to him as Charlie. He now was "Captain" Galway, a title which he could keep the rest of his life if he used a little discretion.

He spent his money freely, not that he was the sort of a man who used possessions with a free hand, but because he was sure that for every ounce he spent now he would have a hundred weight of gold in the future. He had drawn together exactly a hundred men for the expedition. His advertising had been unlike that which ever preceded another journey into the prairies.

He had asked, simply, for men who were young and strong, good shots and riders, and experienced in the ways of Indians and animals on the plains. He wanted these men for one month and offered them not a penny of pay, only a vague promise that they would come to wealth if they followed his guidance.

He stipulated with each adventurer who came to him that a tenth part of any loot or possessions which were derived from the journey should become his property. As for the goal of the journey, he had not a word to say.

These words of Galway attracted the curious; and Witherell always was filled with crowds of adventurous young fellows who were ready for any sort of excitement. At first, a mere handful would enlist, taking Galway's solemn oath in the presence of others—an oath never to leave the expedition and to stand by the companions of the journey to the death. But when the town saw that Galway was buying ten new, strong covered wagons for the inland voyage, together with horses and mules enough to pull the loads, the village grew more interested.

For those ten wagons were loaded with all sorts of necessities, and particularly with lead and gunpowder for the five score excellent new rifles that Galway had bought. It was clear that in this expedition fighting might be expected—fighting and digging, since there were plenty of shovels and picks. But the rest remained a mystery and for the very sake of the mystery the best men came forward to join the little army.

Exactly ninety-nine men were chosen by Galway from the scores of volunteers. He made the hundredth. It would be easier, in this manner, to divide the shares of the spoils.

Only one purchase was made in total secrecy, and that was wood to make a number of gold pans. The rest of the buying was public knowledge; and the entire town of Witherell turned out to watch the expedition start. From the side of the river, where the two stacks of the river boat rose high into the air, the column of wagons and riders started through an outburst of cheers.

They made a very fine picture in white deerskins with decorated saddles and ribbons tied into the manes and tails of their horses. Every man had a long rifle balanced across the pommel of his saddle, and nearly all of them carried revolvers, too, and long knives in whose use they were expert either to take the hide off a buffalo or to slash the throat of a man. They were a wild lot. The oldest of them was under thirty, though a good many wore beards that made them seem experienced men of middle age. The youngest were still in their teens, but strong as maturity and eager to make up for youth by a more savage daring.

On the whole the men of Galway were

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perfectly fitted for fighting Indians because not one of the tribes could have picked out a hundred men more desperate, more fierce, more totally wild. Many of them already had been outlawed in cities farther east; the rest had drifted West in the knowledge that the open frontier was the place for them to use their wits and their hands.

Charlie Galway, as the long train wound up through the hills away from the town, looked over his outfit with a sort of grim pride. He felt that it was a perfect tool, and that his was the perfect hand to wield it. He felt, also, that sudden elevation of mind which comes to a man who is about to make history. He had not a single regret or shame.

His word given to Sabin did not weigh on him in the least. Sabin was too much like an Indian to count. The Redmen had to go down. The wave of "civilization" had to wash deeper into the land, deeper and all the way across it, to the western ocean.

So the train dipped down from the hills into the green plain and moved steadily across it like a great, unjointed, but living snake.

ALL was done in good order. Ahead of the main body three of the best shots on the best horses felt the way. Three more on either side guarded the flanks in the distance and a third trio hung in the rear. It would have been hard to surprise an organism whose nervous system extended so far on all sides. But in case of a sudden attack, at least once a day Galway had his men practice the classic defense maneuver of the plains. At a blast of a horn, the head of the procession turned to the left. The rear of the train pulled out in the same direction, and the ten huge wagons rapidly formed in a circle, like a caterpillar coiling head to tail. Inside that strong wall men and horses gathered as inside a fort. A thousand Indians hardly would dare to attempt the storming of such a place of strength.

They were two days out before the first sign of danger appeared. Then, on the edge of the sky, appeared a little column of half a dozen riders. The bend of their backs proved that they were Indians, riding with shorter stirrups than white men ever used. One glimpse of them was enough to send a thrill through the nerves of the hundred men from Witherell. And after that, all of the wagon train kept a sharp lookout.

Scouts began to come in at least once an hour to report that Indians were visible to right, to left, before, behind.

Well, before the wagons pulled through the narrow mouth of the Sacred Valley, there would be fighting, of course. Galway knew that, since the Cheyennes never would give up their holy land without a struggle. But he felt equally certain that the Indians never would be able to guess the destination of the train until it was almost at the mouth of the valley.

If they attacked as the whites entered the ravine, they could be beaten off, no doubt; and once inside, half a dozen rifles could securely plug the mouth of the gulley and keep a whole world of Indians outside. In the meantime, there would be plenty of food and water within the Sacred Valley, and there would be plenty of occupation in washing the gold from the soil.

The patience of the Indians would finally end. And at last the laden wagons—wagons more preciously burdened than any that ever had rolled across the green of the plains—would come streaming out and pass back to Witherell and a high carouse.

The more Galway contemplated his plan, the more perfect it appeared to him. He could see no possible means of failure, unless the Cheyennes actually managed to make a surprise attack. That he did not expect. As a rule the Cheyennes kept on good terms with the whites, and though they were keeping the wagon train under close observation, it was unlikely that they would fight unless they were grossly offended.

For that reason, Galway gave the strictest orders that no attempts should be made

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against any of the Indians who skirted the course which the train was pursuing. That was why a wild rage rushed up into his brain when he heard a chorus of exclamations from the men who rode beside the wagons.

He was inside the powder wagon at the moment, broaching a keg of the stuff in order to replenish some half-empty horns, but when he heard the men crying out that Jerry Pike was bringing in a captive Indian, he was out of the wagon in a storming temper, at once.

And there, sure enough, he saw Jerry Pike coming with a captive led on an Indian pony beside him. It was only a girl. When Galway made sure of that, half of his anger left him at once. He even smiled a little.

Jerry Pike waved his hat and shouted from the distance.

HE came up, yelling: "I got a Cheyenne girl for you, boys, and a right pretty one, at that. Take a look at what I found running around loose on the prairie, Galway!"

The captain took that look and then shouted in his turn.

"Jerry," he said, "d'you know what you've done?"

"Sure I do," said Jerry. "I've caught a beauty and I'm gunna keep her. I'm gunna make a squaw out of her. I've hunted far enough to find my woman. This is her!"

Galway shook his head.

"She goes along with us, but she doesn't go as a squaw. Pike, this is the Blue Bird, and she's about the biggest medicine that the Cheyennes have. They'll never dare to lay a finger on us while we have the Blue Bird. . . . How did you find her?"

"Why, I seen an antelope up the wind and I figgered that a snack of antelope meat would be right good, so I slicked off my hoss and got into the tall grass to stalk. And on the way I come onto a little hollow where a pair of girls was hiding out—a white girl and this one.

"The white girl got to her mare in time to run. But I snagged this one and brought her back with me. She looks better than venison to me. *Hai*—Cheyenne . . . Blue Bird . . . whatever your name is . . . How about you being squaw and Jerry Pike'll be heap big warrior, eh? . . . Her brain's gone to sleep, captain. You see the wood in her face and no sense at all."

"Leave her alone," said Galway. "We're going to wrap her up in cotton and treat her fine. I tell you, she means the kind of luck we've all been looking for. Understand? . . . Blue Bird, you're as safe as you can be. Don't worry a mite about anything. Who was the white girl along with you?"

The Blue Bird turned an expressionless face toward him, her eye remained perfectly dead. He was no more to her than the distant edge of the horizon.

A crowd had gathered around them, riders and men on foot, prying at the beauty of the girl with keen, animal eyes.

Galway made a brief speech, but one that was to the point. He said: "Boys, we're in Cheyenne-land, now. And you know what that means. The Cheyennes are gunna be pretty sour when they find out we've taken the Blue Bird, and they're gunna come swooping down in a flock around us.

"But they won't dare to touch us for fear we'll take it out of the Blue Bird. You know what she is? She's the only living Cheyenne that ever was in the Sacred Valley. She's as holy as church on Sundays, to the whole tribe. She's the one that brought them the water in the big drought. If a man touches the hem of her skirt, he has luck for a year. Mind you, now—no foolish business."

"I go and find her and then you take her away from me," said Jerry Pike, scowling. "What do I get out of this, anyway?"

"I've got a brand new six shooting Colt for you, Jerry," said Galway.

"Have you?" shouted Pike. "Gimme it, then. I'd rather have one of them new guns than a whole tribe of squaws."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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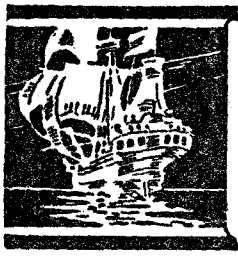

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THE WINNAHS!

A NOBLE job! Readers came through in fine style with letters in response to ARGOSY'S request for information about the most popular story published in the magazine since January 1, 1935. Came through so well, in fact, that editors harvested a crop of headaches trying to narrow down the field and find the twelve best communications.

But here they are—the ARGOSY fans whose names have been placed on the subscription lists and who will receive the magazine regularly each week:

Vick Wilson, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.
Edward A. Sands, New York City.
V. J. Wheaton, Moncton, B. C., Canada.
(Mrs.) John S. Abbott, Chapel Hill, N. C.
Theo. Hewes, Indianapolis, Ind.
Jan H. Luwema, The Hague, Netherlands.
William Crescenta, Jr., Philadelphia, Pa.
Albert M. C. Wallach, New York City.
Murray Foults, Detroit, Mich.
Jay Arcy, Duryea, Pa.
(Miss) Marquita McKinney, Compton, Cal.
James P. Healy, New York City.

Here, too, are the names of the eight stories which received the greatest number of votes; the high spots in ARGOSY between January first and August first, 1935, selected by readers and listed in the order of importance.

"The Monster of the Lagoon" (Worts)—which received a rating just about three times greater than the next highest title, which was:
"War Declared!" (Roscoe)
"Lysander of Chios" (Mason)
"With the Help of Henry" (Tuttle)
"High Treason" (Wilstach)
"Soldiers of Misfortune" (Newsom)
"The Enemy's Goal" (Mason)
"Murder—in Some Degree" (Worts)

And now that's all over—you still have a chance to write and tell us what you think of the stories we're publishing. See the announcement entitled "Of Interest to You!" which appears at the bottom of this page.

ANYTHING to get more stories like "Port of Missing Heads," says

MARY BELLE WALLEY

Theodore Roscoe knows his onions. "Port of Missing Heads," recently printed in ARGOSY of June the 29th, is a corking good story. But if, as he says, he has written one hundred and sixty stories, he ought to be puncture-proof by this time.

Please, Mr. Editor, if Mr. Roscoe has not run out of ideas give us more of him! If his muse has balked, reprint some of the one hundred and sixty old ones—anything to get more stories of the same caliber as "Port of Missing Heads."

Butler, N. J.

Of Interest to You!

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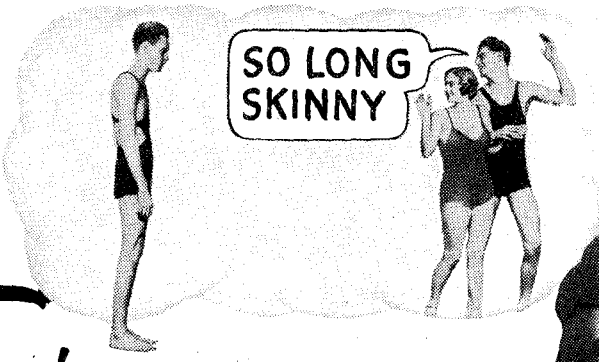

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